LEICESTERSHIRE AND ITS HUNTS

BY CHARLES SIMPSON

LEICESTERSHIRE AND ITS HUNTS

THE QUORN IN THE BELVOIR VALE

LEICESTERSHIRE & ITS HUNTS: THE QUORN, THE COTTESMORE, & THE BELVOIR

BY CHARLES SIMPSON, R.I. WITH 28 ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR AND 55 IN BLACK AND WHITE BY THE AUTHOR, AND AN INTRODUCTION BY MAJOR A. BURNABY, M.F.H.

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TO

MY FATHER

"That Sire of the Chase—our crack Nimrod, old Meynell,
Once said to a famed brother Sportsman of Quorn,
That 'the fame and the fun of a Les'tershire kennel
Would cease—when the sun ceased to gladen the morn.'
He's gone, but each year proves how true the prediction;
Unmarred is our sport—undiminished our fame,
He's gone, and this day shows his words were no fiction,
For 'Hunting and Les'tershire' still mean the same."

Meltonian Song, 1831.

INTRODUCTION

By MAJOR A. BURNABY, M.F.H.

THE well-known painter, and author of "A Pastorale" and "El Rodeo," Mr. Charles Simpson, who has undertaken to produce this book on Leicestershire, has had considerable experience as a horseman, until a bad fall some years ago most unfortunately put an end for a time to any active participation in the hunting field, whereby the public will be the gainer, as his powers of depicting the horse in movement are beyond praise, as can be seen by all who have read the book he produced on El Rodeo, and the admirable illustrations it contains—and if further evidence were required as to his paintings on sporting subjects, it is only necessary to mention that he was awarded the Olympic medal in Paris at the exhibition of sporting pictures held in connection with the Olympic games in 1924, for a painting exhibited by him there.

So-called High Leicestershire, from a fox-hunting and riding outlook, consists of parts of the Quorn, the Belvoir, the Cottesmore, and Fernie's Hunts; and is practically confined on the north by the Fosse Road, which passes Syston, then on by Six Hills—a well-known meet of the Quorn, and misnamed, as the country is flat, but there are six roads leading to it—then on past Widmerpool New Inn, and Owthorpe Borders (a wood which adjoins the Fosse Way as you proceed along it towards Newark).

Taking a line from Owthorpe Borders, which is a wood of perhaps eighty acres in extent, across the Belvoir Vale which would include that celebrated covert of Sherbrooke's, around which the stream called the Smite winds, and which has been responsible for many a fall as hounds cross it, the line would pass by Melton, on by Oakham to Manton, close to which village lies Manton Gorse, from which many a good Cottesmore gallop has started, and around which are some of the finest pastures in the Shires.

From Manton, taking a line to Market Harborough, the circle would be completed by following the Harborough and Leicester road, although much of the country adjacent to that road is no longer huntable on account of being

built over, but High Leicestershire would certainly include the Langtons Sheepthorns Covert, Norton Gorse, and Thurnby—all three celebrated Fernie coverts—and thence on to Scraptoft, a well-known Quorn stronghold; but the country between there and Leicester, three miles away, is no longer rideable, although in my time I have seen a fox caught after an excellent gallop from Billesdon Coplow, where now stands the Asylum at Humberstone.

The country lying between Scraptoft and the Melton, Oakham, and Manton road is hilly and very undulating—the ridge running between Tilton village and Billesdon Coplow (a celebrated fox covert—and who in the chase has not read of the Billesdon Coplow run?) being a landmark which can be seen for twenty miles. This ridge is seven hundred feet above sea-level. The Tilton woods rest on high ground, then comes Robin-a-Tiptoe—distinguishable from the other hills by three trees that grow on its summit; a mile or two further on stretches Owston Wood, always, to my mind, the finest fox covert in the world. The wood lies high and a fine extent of undulating pasture stretches therefrom up to the road running from Burrough-on-the-Hill, through Somerby and Cold Overton, on to Ranksborough Hill.

Were I asked to show a stranger a view of High Leicestershire, it would be the view obtainable on either side of this road, to the south and east of which the grass stretches up to Tilton church spire, and to the west and north to the high ground above Lowesby and Baggrave, across the Ashby valley to Gaddesby, then Gartree Hill and beyond to the high ground, running from Ragdale to Saxelby in the Quorn country, on to Scalford, which lies a few miles north-west of Melton Mowbray, and from where also a fine twenty-mile view can be obtained over Leicestershire.

High Leicestershire is truly a grass country, carrying a good scent, which enables hounds to carry it on at a pace and with a head which it is not possible for them to achieve in many other countries elsewhere.

This pace at which hounds run has been developed since Hugo Meynell—when he hunted the Quorn country at the beginning of the nineteenth century—introduced it, which he did by forcing the pace then called " forward hunting " and which we now call the forward cast, thus not only giving the fox your hounds are hunting the credit of being a good one (all good things or beings run straight), but by getting your hounds nearer to their fox on improving terms. Hounds have also been bred in the last one hundred and twenty years to stick to their hunted fox, or rather to persevere with a sinking fox, which marks the difference between a good pack of hounds and a good huntsman, and the contrary in both cases.

In order to arrive at this state of excellence, it is necessary that hounds should be well disciplined—always, according to accounts, a detriment in the times of our forefathers—and this should be effected without the use of whip-cord, excepting in the very early stages, when hounds are being entered to fox, and to break them from riot.

It also depends very greatly on kennel management. Hounds that are suffering from deficient feeding do not carry a good head, and thus the body of the pack do not assist at the proper and right time, which, if they did, would result in their killing their fox in brilliant style rather than that their energies should evaporate with the scent that does likewise with a sinking fox.

The above combination, sparsely outlined, results in the pace in a grass country such as High Leicestershire, and many are attracted to these glorious pastures in anticipation and the promise of it, and more than ever nowadays when everything that is not fast is not considered to be of much value, be it a ship, a train, or a motor car ; and this being an age of machinery, I have omitted to mention the horse—but of him, the most important item with any whose intention it is to follow the hounds over Leicestershire, I must speak.

As the pace of hounds increased, and the method of hunting them in Leicestershire came into practice, hard riding came into vogue. When it was first instituted one hundred and twenty years ago, there were much fewer fences than at the present day. Fifty years ago, although the fences had increased, there were fewer gates than there are to-day. In fact, nowadays parts of High Leicestershire are so well gated that in a slow hunt it is possible for some with a good knowledge of the country to see a good deal of what hounds are doing without jumping many fences. But not so when hounds really run. Riding over the undulating grass and the thorn fences, it is not essential to be in exactly the same field as hounds in order to see them. That is one of the charms of High Leicestershire. But it is necessary to ride your own line and to keep on that line, and to accomplish this you must be riding a horse that can gallop, and you must take the fences as they come, and have an eye to a country so that you may avoid the impossible or unnegotiable obstacle. A bad turn may throw you and your galloping horse hopelessly out of the hunt. But a man stands some chance of regaining his position, and so to be in touch with the flying pack, if he will persevere on his own line, however wide a sweep he may have to make.

So that riding over Leicestershire is not only a matter of having a high-class galloping horse, or of being able to sit on that horse as he flies over the thorn fences, or to harbour his endurance as you cross the ridge and furrows or

ascend the hillsides; it is, I think, indisputable that in order to accomplish a smooth performance it is necessary for the rider to have good hands—also for the rider to be quick, but with no apparent sign of hurry. Out of a field of three or four hundred riders, how many are there that can ride a good horse so as to get the best out of him with the least exertion on both the horse and the rider's part? Shall we say 10 per cent.? Possibly we should be nearer the mark if we put it down at half that number; so that out of a field of four hundred, when hounds really run, about twenty will see the way they go. It has always been so, I believe, and will, in my humble opinion, remain the same. Do the remainder not ride across Leicestershire, then? Of course they do, and gallop too, and jump innumerable fences and every sort of obstacle, and enjoy themselves and the whole thing very much—but they do not see the hounds.

As far back as 1864, in describing a fine gallop he had with his hounds, Mr. W. Tailby writes: "Hounds ran for one hour and thirty minutes on December 26th, and were stopped in the dark at Holt Wood. The company was well pleased, tho' I think it was only distance that lent enchantment to the view. Personally I was never better carried on my horse Chieftain."

There are, I think, more people—and certainly more women—attempting to sit down and ride, taking the fences as they come, nowadays, than in the past. We find in all records of the chase in the sixties of the last century practically no mention of any ladies taking part in the chase. Some, indeed, rode to the meet and then went home, and it was not until the eighties or nineties that the number of ladies hunting increased, and since those days they have increased systematically and regularly. They have demonstrated that the best of them can hold their own with the average man in the hunting field. For some, no fence is too big and no brook too wide. Women, generally speaking, find it more difficult to really make a horse extend himself in his gallop, but that may possibly be on account of the side-saddle, but it has not been my privilege to see very many ladies who are able to ride successfully across Leicestershire riding astride.

In regard to the thorn fences in Leicestershire. These, and the old turf, are responsible for the great attraction of riding to hounds in that country. Thirty years ago there were many more bullfinches than there are at the present day, and the absence of these so often impenetrable obstacles no doubt makes it now all the more agreeable. Their downfall is attributable to the upkeep of the art of hedge-cutting, which has been so generously supported by all hunting in Leicestershire. With few exceptions the bullfinches have been

cut and laid, so that except for timber, be it a Scotch paling consisting of a long runner to which pales are nailed, or morticed posts and rails with which the thorn fences have been mended for some cause or other, the Leicestershire fence is a stake-and-bound.

When newly-cut and laid, the height of the fence should be 4-ft. 6-in., but it is apt to sag a bit with the weather, and it is, in many cases, considerably lower.

With the ditch on the take-off or on the landing side, as the case may be, and with the thorns laid in the ditch, so as to prevent stock getting to and destroying the young shoots or growth, the stake-and-bound fence makes a formidable obstacle—not so much, perhaps, on a fresh horse, well ridden; but when hounds have run hard for twenty-five or forty minutes, over the ridge and furrow, maybe without a check, it is a different matter. It is not always that the good rider on the good horse makes absolutely the right turn—and with few exceptions a turn is bound to come sooner or later—so that with each mistake made so much the more distance is there to be made up, and so much more has the horse to do, and his endurance is taxed.

There are places in Leicestershire that are unjumpable; with an intimate knowledge of the country, or with a good eye to a country, these can be avoided. Otherwise, how much time is lost while the flying pack does not dwell! Among these are many bottoms, or old watercourses. The flow of water along them has worn away the banks, and as years go on they grow deeper and deeper, with overhanging banks, rendering them unjumpable except in a few places.

It is then, when hounds are running, that you must be riding a galloping horse. Hounds may have swung away from you after they disappear through the fence at the top of the incline, beyond one of these bottoms.

It is then that a man or a woman must have an eye to a country, and such instinct as they possess must come into play instantaneously, and, without hesitation, they must sit down and ride their own line.

There have been many runs with good points in Leicestershire in my lifetime, which can be recalled with infinite pleasure. For instance; on December 14th, 1894, in Lord Lonsdale's Mastership, and with Tom Firr as huntsman and Fred Earp first whipper-in, the Quorn had a great run from Barkby Holt. Starting slowly by Beeby towards Barkby Thorpe, they turned; and running on passed Keyham, swinging left-handed between Baggrave and Lowesby on by John o' Gaunt, then entering the Cottesmore country, ran over Whadborough Hill, keeping Owston Wood a field on

their left, straight through Launde Wood, past Loddington, running close to Finchley Bridge, nearly to Horninghold, then to the left to Bolt Wood, Stockerston, where the fox, dead beat, got into the main earths. Time two hours, forty minutes. Point fourteen miles, and about twenty-three as hounds ran.

In December 1921, during the present joint Mastership, with Walter Wilson as hunstman and R. Thatcher first whipper-in, the Quorn ran very fast from Cream Gorse, leaving Gaddesby right-handed, and running parallel with the brook, they crossed between Ashby and Twyford; checking for a moment at Thimble Hall, the only check until reaching the Uppingham turnpike, to which they ran at a great pace, through Lord Morton's Covert then towards Tilton, from which the hounds swung right-handed to ground in the Skeffington Vale. Time forty-five minutes with an eight-mile point. The fox was coursed by a sheep-dog as he reached the turnpike, which, no doubt, saved his life.

During one October when the late Mr. W. Baird was Master, with George Gilson as huntsman, the Cottesmore had a great gallop. Tied to their fox, and with only eight men in attendance, hounds came away from Owston Wood, ran straight under the viaduct at John o' Gaunt, crossing the Twyford Valley, past Baggrave, without touching a covert until they ran hard into Barkby Holt with a point of eight miles.

During the late Mr. E. Hanbury's Mastership of these hounds, with Arthur Thatcher as huntsman, hounds found in Tilton Wood, and after running for forty minutes round the wood, forced their fox away to Noseley in Fernie's country; from there without dwelling, they ran at a great pace, past East Norton, between Belton and Loddington, over the Hog's Back by Launde, and leaving Prior's Coppice on their right killed their fox in the field alongside the old lane, beyond Cheseldine Coppice, which is a nine-mile point from Noseley, the whole run occupying over two hours and a half.

There have been many excellent runs with Mr. Fernie's hounds. When Charles Isaac was hunting them, many a time have we found ourselves in the dusk of the evening in the heart of the Quorn Friday country, and if my memory serves me, in February, quite thirty years ago, these hounds ran a fox from close to Sheepthorns, across the lovely Ashlands Vale, by Scraptoft to Adam's Gorse, with a point of nine miles.

The Belvoir have been renowned for their great pace from time immemorial. Few horses could live with the Belvoir dog hounds; on a breast-high scent they flew. In the winter of 1898–9 they hunted the same fox, field for field,

on three occasions, finding him each time in Granby Gap, and running to within a short distance of Newark, a point of ten miles, and necessitating a hack of over twenty miles back to Melton—and so on *ad infinitum*.

Generally speaking, twelve miles an hour is a good pace for hounds to run at, but I have seen hounds run five miles in seventeen minutes, which would be at the rate of at least sixteen miles an hour.

There are two well-known sayings—one is, " It is the pace that kills," and the other, " It is money that makes the mare to go." Both are nearly absolutely correct—but, in the first instance, perseverance is necessary as well as pace, and in regard to the second, a man or woman can pay colossal prices for hunters and not see the way hounds run nearly so well as the hunt servants, who, generally speaking, are not mounted on very high-priced horses, but who, in the well-appointed Hunts in the Shires, are amongst the twenty-five who are always there—so let all who have a passion for riding, be it in a riding-school, or in a show ring, or on the plains of North or South America or Australia, come and see for themselves whether they can " do the trick " when hounds run across Leicestershire. It is, in fact, an art in itself, just as much as El Rodeo, or riding a race, or riding in the Italian School or at Weedon, when it is well done.

PREFACE

THE material available for compiling this book was so varied and extensive that some scheme had to be adopted which would give it coherence and unity. The divisions of the countries hunted by the famous packs, the Quorn, the Cottesmore and the Belvoir, served as a framework; and into this framework has been gradually pieced together what may be described as a tapestry depicting scenes of the chase with the Leicestershire landscape as their background. It was at first intended to include the whole of Leicestershire in one volume, but the design would have exceeded its prescribed limits, and a second volume is now in preparation dealing with the countries of the Fernie and the Atherstone.

The illustrations are mainly sketches and have no pretensions to be regarded as hunting pictures worked up in the studio. All the coloured illustrations of woods and coverts were painted on the spot, and the impressions of actual runs were recorded a few hours after the incidents they depict took place. Most of the reproductions in black-and-white are from drawings made while exploring the country.

Before making acknowledgment for much help received during the progress of the book, a few points must be made clear. In order to avoid confusion, railways are referred to as named on the Ordnance Map and mentioned by various writers previous to the recent amalgamation of some of the main lines. The spelling of local names has gradually changed, and in most cases the modern forms are used; two exceptions are Wreake and Fosse. On the Ordnance Map the final "e" is dropped in both; the original spelling of the former was Wreke. In all quotations the writer's spelling is given, though in some cases this is inconsistent and incorrect. Tom Noel's diary contains surprising variations, even in the same paragraph. An index of place-names will be found at the end of the book.

My grateful acknowledgments are due to Mr. C. Alex. Muntz for his able assistance with regard to the chapters dealing with hunting topography, and for his aid in local research. No man ever had a more energetic collaborator, or one who made the ground-work necessary for a book of this kind a greater

pleasure; apart from his knowledge of the country as a hunting man, Mr. Muntz has an eye for landscape and its physical character which has made his assistance doubly valuable.

I wish particularly to thank Major Burnaby, M.F.H., for his kind help and advice, and for looking through the proofs; Mr. W. E. Paget, M.F.H., Mr. James Baird, M.F.H., and Captain Marshall Roberts, M.F.H., for their courteous assistance; Mr. Henry Noel for allowing me to print extracts from Tom Noel's diary and other manuscripts; Mr. E. Ernest Ellis for the loan of many books, and for placing at my disposal the fruits of his long study of local lore and history; Major-General O'Dowda, C.B., C.S.I., C.M.G., and Mrs. O'Dowda for their help, especially in compiling the index; Lieut.-Colonel and Mrs. Paget Fielding Johnson, with whom I spent many days exploring the country before arranging the plan of the book, for their assistance, particularly with regard to the Forest side; also the following, among others, for their kindness and help on various occasions: Sir Theodore Cook, Mr. C. J. Phillips, Major-General Vaughan, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Captain the Hon. Lancelot Lowther, O.B.E., Colonel Alexander, Captain Robinson, Major J. W. Burns, Major Metcalfe, Mr. W. A. Groome, Mrs. E. B. Baillie, Mrs. Norman, Canon Ashmall, Captain J. Otho Paget, Dr. L. A. Neale, Mrs. E. C. Clayton, Mr. J. Finch, Mr. G. W. Brewitt, Mr. J. G. Baldock (especially for local information about Willoughby Field and permission to sketch the cannon-ball found there), the Rev. R. Wood, Mr. Fred Earp, Miss Firr, Mr. Talbott, Mr. H. T. Hanbury, Mr. W. G. Constable, M.A., Mr. C. E. Vulliamy, F.R.G.S., and all who, if not mentioned here, must accept my gratitude for any assistance rendered.

With regard to the illustrations, my cordial thanks are due to Mr. Walter Wilson, Mr. James Welch and Mr. Nimrod Capell for many facilities in making sketches, including the drawings of hounds and some of the woods and coverts. My only regret is that there was not time or opportunity to paint more elaborate pictures, but nearly all the illustrations in the book were made during the season 1924–25, when their time was fully occupied.

NOTE

I herewith thank the undermentioned authors and publishers for their kind permission to include in this volume quotations from the following works:—

Captain J. Otho Paget and Messrs. Methuen & Co., Ltd., *Memories of the Shires*. Mr. John Masefield and Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd., 20-21 Bedford Street, London, W.C., *Reynard the Fox*. Messrs. George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., *The Cream of Leicestershire* and *The Best Season on Record*, by "Brooksby" (Captain E. Pennell-Elmhirst); and *Records of the Chase*, by "Cecil" (Cornelius Tongue). Messrs. Constable & Co., Ltd., *The History of the Belvoir Hunt*, by T. F. Dale, M.A. Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., *British Hunting*, edited by Arthur W. Coaten. Messrs. Hutchinson & Co., *Kings of the Hunting Field*, by "Thormanby" (Willmott Dixon). Messrs. Elliot Stock, *Leicestershire and Rutland Notes and Queries*. Messrs. Grant Richards, *Fox-Hunting in the Shires*, by T. F. Dale, M.A.

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In the course of writing this book reference was also made to the following works:

Hunting Tours, by "Nimrod"* (C. J. Apperley), and other works by the same author; *The Reminiscences of Frank Gillard*, by Cuthbert Bradley; *A Hunting Diary*, by John Beard; *Silk and Scarlet*, by "The Druid" (Henry Hall Dixon), and other works by the same author; *Billesdon Coplow*, by Robert Lowth; *Thoughts on Hunting*, by Peter Beckford; *Riding Recollections*, by J. G. Whyte Melville; *The Victoria History of the County of Leicester*, edited by William Page, F.S.A.; Nichol's, Throsby's, and Curtis's Histories of Leicester; Hunting Anthologies compiled by Lady Birkett and Sir Reginald Graham, Bart.; *The Geology of the Country near Leicester* and *The Geology of Charnwood Forest*, by C. Fox-Strangways, F.G.S.; Leland's *Itinerary;* Gardiner's and Clarendon's Histories of the Civil War; *Records of the County of Nottingham in the Seventeenth Century; Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New Series, Vol. VI; *The Stane Street*, by Hilaire Belloc; *Hadrian's Wall* and *The Saxon Shore*, by J. Mothersole; White's and Kelly's Directories; *Leicestershire and Rutland*, in the "Little Guides" Series (Messrs. Methuen & Co., Ltd.); *Nottinghamshire*, in the "Highways and Byways" Series (Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd.). Many other books have been occasionally referred to, or are quoted in the works mentioned.

* In the following pages the pseudonyms of well-known hunting writers are not printed between inverted commas. Many writers now omit inverted commas for Nimrod and The Druid, and it is inconsistent to differentiate with regard to later authors.

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PART I

PAST AND PRESENT

CHAPTER I

A PANORAMA OF LEICESTERSHIRE

"Both nature and art have contributed to render Leicestershire the country for fox-hunting. To the former it is indebted for the depth and richness of its soil—favourable to holding a scent; and to the latter, for the large size of its enclosures, for the general practicability of its fences, for the greatest portion of the land being old pasture, and for the numerous gorse coverts made for the purpose of breeding and preserving foxes."—NIMROD.

THE majority of hunting people know Leicestershire only in winter, leaving the country after the Melton Races until the hunting season comes round again.

It is a unique movement of humanity that floods this fox-hunter's paradise each November with a host of sportsmen and sportswomen, including not only the finest riders in England, but also riders from many parts of the world, only to vanish again, as it were in a night, with the first green of spring.

The winter landscape has become familiar through sporting pictures and the mass of hunting literature to many who have not themselves hunted in the Shires, but in summer the country has been sadly neglected; and fine as its winter scenes are, with the dark tracery of leafless trees, the long dark lines of the fences, and the green fields, there remains much to be known of a land which in summer has a fullness and beauty that cannot be approached elsewhere in the Midlands.

Take a burning summer day—a June day—when the soft wind that blows is that of the North-East Trades *en route* to the Brazils, and imagine the road from Leesthorpe to Pickwell, close to the county border. It is a hill road, climbing continually, and it has the attraction of the hills. It is quite deserted. There is no steady jog of a hunt on its way to the Punch Bowl. To-day the Punch Bowl on the right of the road simmers in the heat like a volcano. Far ahead beyond the village of Pickwell is the long skyline of Pickwell Big Field, a fine upland pasture. The familiar road runs through Somerby, at whose western limit a field, now golden with buttercups, and bounded by a low stone wall, recalls many a memory of scarlet-coated horsemen swinging down the

grassy hill. A little further on, as the road climbs higher, a lane branching from it leads up to the ancient encampment on Burrough Hill, which is our destination; from its summit we may view the panorama spread on every side—the cream of English hunting country.

The encampment was once a fortified position of great strength, irregular in shape, its circumvallation being governed by the natural features of its position. No traces of masonry have been found there recently, though Leland writes of the existence of walls:

"The place that is now cawllid *Borow Hilles* is duble dichid, and containith within the Diche to my Estimation iiii. score Acres.

"First I tooke hit for a Campe of Menne of Warre, but after I plaine perceivid that hit had been waullid about with stone, and to be sure pullid out sum Stones at the entering of hit, wher hath been a great Gate, and ther found Lyme betwixt the Stones."

In 1853 some excavations were made, and signs of Celtic occupation were thought to have been discovered, *i.e.*, rude potsherds, flint arrow-heads, and the remains of a skeleton, buried in a crouched position, but Roman coins have also been unearthed, and a dagger and spearhead thought to be Roman (*Leic. Arch. Soc.* vii. 23).

To-day the outlines of the camp can only be traced by following the mounds of grass. The high grassy plateau surrounded by stunted trees, and the steep fall of ground to the north-west, are reminiscent of Borcovicus, or Housesteads, on the Roman Wall. As on those wild fells, a kestrel hovers above the tree-tops. But instead of the fells of Northumberland, we are looking down on the Friday country of the Quorn, a very different panorama. The plateau is a scene of pastoral quiet. The landscape is brilliant under a blue sky, a light breeze soughing through the trees and singing among the blades of grass. In the vast amphitheatre of the camp stand two mares and a foal, motionless, basking in the heat. A few cows are grazing. Swallows fly high over the sward, while shorn and horned sheep disturb the flies for them. Here, nearly two thousand years ago, Roman soldiers kept guard in this, their splendid fastness, looking out over a country only half subdued, where warrior tribes were able to oppose their conquest with terrible retaliation, such as the Roman massacre by the Iceni, not a hundred miles away. Yet now, the associations of the spot are all of hunting; the very name of each feature in the landscape brings to the mind no other thought.

Whether one looks north-east, where Freeby Wood stands sultry and veiled in haze, or due north over the Burton Flats and the Burton ridge, to

where the central uplands of the Monday Quorn, marked by the chimneys of the ironworks, their smoke streaming eastward, rise up from the valley of the Wreake—or beyond Old Dalby, drop down to the Vale of Belvoir and Nether Broughton—the associations they bring to mind are all of the names which have made them famous, of horse and hound, and the far-winding horn.

Let us visit Burrough Wood, on the north-west slope of the escarpment, and on the way turn round and face eastwards. An enormous stretch of country, as undulating as the Atlantic after days of gale, extends to the Vale of Catmose and rises again to Burley Wood, just visible as a distant haze. Nearer are the heights that lead to Ranksborough, and barely a mile away is the square tower of Pickwell Church in its setting of green trees. On the right of Pickwell are the High Woods of Cold Overton Hall, and almost due south the serried trees of Owston Wood, all in the territory of the Cottesmore. Follow the distant ridge, and you come to Whadborough Hill, to Tilton Church with its lonely spire, and beyond, back again in Quorn country, to the distant summit of the Coplow.

Arrived at the north-west corner, we look down on Burrough Wood, the haunt of sparrow-hawks and kestrels—and foxes. Again a fine country is spread before us. There is Gunn's Lodge just below, over the hill away to the north-west are the roofs of Great Dalby, and in front, the winding road that climbs and twists to Thorpe Satchville. Further left is Salter's Hill (in Cottesmore country), with its scattered gorse ; and on the left again, two miles away, is Adam's Gorse—who has not galloped from there on a winter's day ?—and beyond, Thorpe Satchville itself. In the heat haze to the north-west and lying more remote are the famous coverts, Ashby Pastures and Cream Gorse, and near by Gaddesby village. So we follow the land to the Twyford Vale, up the long slope to Thimble Hall, and down again, from crest to crest, until we see the wooded park of Baggrave. Here is the Prince of Wales's Covert—who cannot hear the halloas ?—and close by such names as Beeby, Barsby, Barkby Holt, Scraptoft Spinneys, Keyham, Hungerton, and Quenby, and here we cry halt ! Far beyond the blue haze is Leicester and the faint outlines of Charnwood Forest.

We must return to Burrough Hill and the scenery nearer at hand, or the panorama will exceed the limits of vision. While standing on the soft grass and looking away to the low crest of Ashby Pastures, small clouds have gathered, and the wood, which a short while before shone in the haze with sunlight glinting on its white gates, is now dark in shadow, outlined against the sky. The passing clouds mould the features of the landscape in sharper relief, and as

they float overhead, trailing their shadows beneath them, give prominence first to one ridge and then to another. The panorama is broken up into a series of distances, passing from dark to light, and back to dark again beneath the chasing shadows. The June day is changing with the fickleness of the month, and heavier clouds are massing above the distant smoke of Leicester. Against this sultry background the roofs of Burrough-on-the-Hill shine for a moment

BURROUGH HILL, FROM THE TWYFORD ROAD.

in the sun and then become eclipsed. The area of shade approaches the slopes of Burrough Hill itself, and the wind becomes colder.

As time passes and the whole sky is overcast, the rays of the sun penetrate to far distances. Beneath shafts of light a streak of emerald and gold threads its way along the Twyford Vale by Ashby Folville, glinting on roof and church tower, isolating a group of trees in its golden iridescence like the spot-lights of a gigantic stage. A more hazy shaft of light plays upon the far-off ridge that leads towards the last brow of hills before the Valley of the Wreake. Far into Leicestershire one can gaze now, and under this display of spot-light and sudden eclipse pick out hill and vale for many miles, where before they were

lost in the general haze. And thus the configuration of the country becomes more apparent.

The quotation from Nimrod's famous " Hunting Tours " which precedes this chapter is interesting, not only because it raises the question how far the properties of different soils may be considered favourable or otherwise for retaining the scent of the fox, apart from the more vital consideration of weather, but because it suggests that a brief description of the geological features of the county may not be out of place in a hunting book. How many followers of hounds in Leicestershire have paused to consider the nature of the soil, closely at times as they may have been acquainted with it ! Yet the country over which they ride presents for the geologist problems unsurpassed for interest by any other district in England. The familiar features of the landscape are striking enough to make the dullest wits wonder at times as to their origin ; and they are so varied that it is difficult to understand the lingering tradition that Leicestershire is flat and monotonous.

The popular misconception may be accounted for by the fact that where the country is hilly it is so precipitously hilly as to dwarf the lower undulations of its surface into insignificance. The impression when standing on the summit of Burrough Hill or Billesdon Coplow is that the spectator views from an eminence a wide and slightly undulating plain, broken for the most part only by shallow valleys and those artificial fox coverts which, as Nimrod remarks, are the contribution of art to the natural qualities of this fox-hunting county.

In reality these eminences are part of a long escarpment forming a watershed whereby the country is drained, the streams flowing with few exceptions into the Trent basin on the west, and on the east draining into the Welland and finally into The Wash.

We are dealing now with the southern part of the county, and not with the northern portion which rises to the heights of Charnwood Forest.

It is unnecessary to weary the non-technical reader with the geological history of this district in detail, but a brief summary of the stages which have resulted in its present formation will not be out of place here, contributing, as they undoubtedly do, to its peculiar suitability for the chase.

The greatest elevation of the watershed previously mentioned is seven hundred and fifty-five feet at Whadborough Hill.

Fox-Strangways says (" The Geology of the Country near Leicester," page 2) : " The physical aspect of the country is greatly influenced by the Drift. This, in former times, appears to have completely covered the district, and to have obliterated its older features, so that the surface of the land gradually

declined in one broad sheet from the line of watershed. Along the outcrop of the Middle Lias between Burrough and Billesdon there must have been a pre-Glacial feature as fine as the present escarpment, where the fall in the ground was somewhat rapid ; but beyond this there was a nearly uniform slope, which was so slight that the ground may be considered to have been nearly level. This plateau, which was lowest along the line of the present Soar Valley, has been cut into by the tributaries of this stream ; so that the present aspect of the country is that of a great plain intersected by numerous furrows, that have been carved out by the tributary streams. The same thing has taken place on the eastern side of the watershed, the present streams apparently flowing nearly along the same lines as they did before the deposition of the Drift, which they have cut through, leaving only patches on their flanks. The effect of this denudation is that the escarpment of the Middle Lias, forming the highest ground in the map, rises in a more or less abrupt bank, overlooking a general plain of lower ground to the west which has been furrowed into a series of ridge-like hills by the numerous streams that flow down to the main Soar Valley. To the east of the Middle Lias escarpment the ground falls away gradually to the Vale of Catmose, in the centre of Rutland ; but this is principally along the valleys, as the ridges between maintain a fair altitude to beyond the limit of this map " (Geol. Survey, sheet 156).

The Middle Lias belongs to that pre-Glacial period of the earth's history termed geologically Jurassic, and consists of Marlstone rock-bed, or sandy shales and clays with ironstone. The Glacial Drift superimposed upon it is largely made up of chalky Boulder-clay with intercalated beds of sand and gravel, themselves superimposed on older Boulder-clay and Quartzose sand. It will be seen, therefore, that Nimrod writes truly of the " depth and richness " of the soil in this area of Leicestershire—different indeed from the naked granite of Mountsorrel and the slates and hornstones of Charnwood, carrying back to a far older period of the earth's history.

But what, it may be asked, has this to do with hunting ? It is the explanation why hills so precipitous and lofty (their average height, seven hundred feet, is but three hundred feet lower than many of the bleak and barren moors in Devon and Cornwall) are covered with smooth pasture-land, soft to ride upon, with no treacherous rocks concealed beneath its surface, so that the area of grassland which has made Leicestershire so famous continues unbroken over this formidable barrier and down into the valleys on either side.

Exhausting to climb as some of these hills are, they are everywhere rideable ; even more so to-day than a century or two ago. " The Soile berith very good

Corne," writes Leland of Burrough Hill, but it is many years since a plough disturbed these rolling acres of grass.

It will also be realised, from Fox-Strangways' description, how to the east of this watershed the hills and valleys are sharply defined in the Cottesmore country in the south-western corner of Rutland, and in that part of the Fernie and Cottesmore Hunts which runs from Harborough to Tilton known as High Leicestershire; while on the west the Soar Valley approaches nearer to the character of a plain, containing those broad enclosures sloping gradually away to the more level country running towards the border of Nottinghamshire

BURROUGH HILL: THE WESTERN ESCARPMENT.

on one side, and Charnwood Forest on the other—the venue of the Friday and Monday meets of the Quorn.

In order to complete this geological digression, we must leave Burrough Hill, already somewhat exposed, even in June, now that the sun has disappeared and a fine rain is driving over the grass heights, and, descending its western slope, take a passing glimpse of the lower valleys. Their hunting fame is largely due to the fact that the golden days of corn are passed; there is more wealth to-day in the cloven hoof than in the rustling cornfield; but the presence of ridge and furrow beneath the turf—testing the nimbleness of a horse's feet—which is so common a feature of Leicestershire grasslands, bears witness to their corn-growing qualities. In a country the basis of whose soil is clay—the rich clays of the Drift superimposed upon the Lower Lias in the valleys—

it was necessary to drain the cornfields by the regular system of ridge and furrow employed. Easy to negotiate when a clever horse has become used to it, ridge and furrow is rather disconcerting to new-comers in the Shires.

These valleys, with their deep alluvial deposits above the clay, became as famous for their pastures as they had been for their corn, and even in the upland fields of more moderate worth, which were once regularly tilled, the pasture, though of inferior quality, brings in a fair profit to the stock-owner. Had it not been for the decline of the corn market, the country round the villages of South Croxton, Gaddesby, and Ashby Folville would have been less celebrated for its hunting associations than for the quality of its grain and the richness of its wide acres under the plough.

This excursion has brought us to the high road between Leicester and Melton Mowbray, running through the heart of the Quorn country. Following a low and narrow ridge above the Valley of the Wreake for the greater part of its fifteen miles, this road looks down over pastoral Leicestershire on either side.

After leaving the village of Syston, three miles from Leicester and close to the junction of the Melton road with the highway through Six Hills to Newark (the Old Fosse Way, to be referred to in a later chapter), a wide view is obtained of the plain intersected by the tributary streams of the Soar, flanked on the west by the distant watershed and on the east by Charnwood Forest. Syston itself (and here it may be mentioned that the "y" is pronounced as in Scythe) is built on a gravel terrace, beds of sand and gravel occurring in several places along the Soar Valley. The village is one of the ugliest in Leicestershire, yet the uniformity of its red-brick houses has a sort of attractiveness, especially in these days, when the cult of the ugly threatens to supersede the love of the more conventional picturesque. But Syston left behind, there is no jarring note to disturb the enjoyment of a landscape typical of Leicestershire at its best.

And here we must for the moment leave it—the famous hunting country receding into blue distances dotted by innumerable trees, the wide fields, outlined by thorn fences, now green with the verdure of summer, undulating over gentle ridges and vales hidden in mist. Looking towards Charnwood, the hills rise up like mountains, sombre beneath a dark canopy of cloud; looking towards Nottingham, the valleys fade into the more level country of the Wolds. Below the road on this side, hidden by trees, is the course of the river Wreake, fed by smaller streams, many famous in the annals of hunting.

The enthusiasm which this country inspires in the men who ride over it has been aptly described by Nimrod:

" To see the paces these men went ; to see the pace at which they rode at their fences, so different to all other countries ; to see them charge a wide and awkward brook without deigning to look at it ; to see some horses in, some turning round not liking it, and about a dozen well over, going by the side of, *if not a little before*, the hounds up one of these large grass fields—is, I repeat, a beautiful sight, and one that only Leicestershire can show."

Nimrod emphasises the words in italics, which will evoke the sympathy—if not a stronger emotion—of many Masters of Hounds to-day ; but this comment does not seem to detract from his admiration of such dashing horsemen. On the method of getting away after hounds in Leicestershire he has much to say, adopting an apologetic tone because, having hunted in the Provinces, he considered himself as losing his chance by being too slow, waiting for the pack to get together, while what he calls " *The Elite* " could only restrain themselves sufficiently to allow six couples of leading hounds to get on the line before they followed at full gallop, leaving the whipper-in to bring up the main body of the pack as best he could, " first by rating, then by cheering." He records the saying of a certain sportsman (unnamed) that " Hounds are sometimes a great bore."

One wonders how the farmers of those days were appeased after the prevalent practice of larking home ; perhaps tact did it, for on one occasion hounds were kept waiting a quarter of an hour for a farmer who was expected at the meet, but was delayed by a local cattle market !

The country viewed from the Melton road, however, looks tempting enough to lark over, and one can easily imagine the quick response to the rider who held up his hat in the air, started his horse on a mad gallop for home, and challenged the rest to follow him.

CHAPTER II

MELTON MOWBRAY

"Betwixt Trent Ripe and *Melton* many Benes and Peson, as yt is communely thorough al *Leyrcestreshire*.

"*Kirkby*, a little Priori of Blake Chanons upon *Wreke* Ryver ii miles beneth *Melton Mowbray* was a late suppressid. I heard say that one *Bellar* was Foundder thereof."—LELAND.

THE gentleman who held up his hat in the air, and we hope out-distanced his rivals, was no doubt a Meltonian; and the goal which eventually called a halt to his gallop was the tower of Melton Church—that "fair Paroche Church," as Leland calls it, rising among leafless trees above the waters of the Eye, and, in the words of Nimrod, "often a grateful sight to a returning sportsman on a beaten horse." It is now more often a grateful sight to his second horseman, though he may notice it with pleasure through the wind-screen of a Rolls-Royce. But the rider whose course we are following in the vale below Rearsby and Brooksby, as he takes his fences, with a glance behind him perhaps to note an empty saddle and a mud-spattered rival picking himself up, or a sudden urge to his horse as a follower presses him too close, will sight the tower of Melton Church with a triumphant smile. Breasting the hill, he may take the road at Kirby Bellars, and canter home along the grass by its edge—hot, happy, and elated. He will ride into Melton streets in just the mood for a great evening, to lark over his wine as he larked over his fences, and await, with the table ready, the return of the steeplechasers one by one.

Those were great days in Melton—bachelor days, as more than one writer somewhat regretfully remarks—when feats performed in the field were rivalled by feats performed in the early hours of the morning. What energy they had, those sportsmen! and what port!

Witness the following incident from the pages of Brooksby, one out of many selected at random:

"It was before breakfast, some hours, that a rider came up the drawing-room stairs. Had he ridden down again he would have been the richer by an

honest penny. But his trusted steed refused the office; his wager was lost; and all he could do was to make the best of his failure by selling his horse upstairs for a century less than he had refused for him on terra firma. The winner of the bet was the buyer; and he thus found himself in a position to

"A GRATEFUL SIGHT TO A RETURNING SPORTSMAN."

afford scaffolding and crane, by means of which his new purchase will eventually return to humbler quarters. At present the latter appears to be very much at his ease, apparently feeling in no degree abashed by the novelty and grandeur of his position. The occasion of his descent is to be held as high holiday by the Townsfolk, and will be considered as the winding-up event of the Melton Season."

The effects of such evenings did not apparently wear off until well into the following day. Here is a further quotation from the same author :

" The autumn hour of 4.30 on Wednesday, Nov. 12th, found the main street of Melton clattering to returning hoofs (we can hunt with less condition and make out the day with a single horse up to Christmas) ; and in the dusk was pointed out the closed shutter of the local Tobacconist's shop. No one lay dead within ; nor had the Meltonians, eager to put by a winter consumption, emptied its contents so rapidly as to bring the worthy man's business to a sudden standstill. No, they have put his walls of cigar boxes, his fences of briar roots and white meerschaums to quite a different purpose—they try their hacks over them ! . . . On Wednesday morning, crash through the closed window came a Meltonian on his way to covert. The chandelier volleyed across the shop ; pipes and cigars flew in every direction ; but the horse was unhurt, and scarcely a curl of the rider's head was ruffled. No permission have I to disclose the perpetrator of this Curtian leap."

A connected hunting history of Melton has apparently never been written. The library of the British Museum can produce no lengthy description of the town, only a few paragraphs in dry topographical histories. Hunting references to it are scattered throughout the vast literature of the subject, and to bring them together in a connected form means the perusal of many volumes. The best reminiscences are probably hidden away in private diaries, or, like the Epics of Homer, have been handed on by word of mouth, many to perish now those who recounted them are no more. Outwardly, the town to-day reveals little of its past history. Yet in many ways it has hardly changed since the time when Leland rode into its streets from Clawson village " by veri fair meadows." In some ways it has become modernised, the shops have lost their old-world appearance, the latticed windows have been replaced by plate glass and the vulgarity of modern advertisement ; but it would not be going too far to paraphrase a sentence from Hardy : " The fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet *Melton* remained."

Melton Mowbray has to an unusual degree the air of being completely aloof from the struggle for existence that is the lot of nine-tenths of humanity. It seems to disdain alike the common toil and the common pleasure, for its only cinema is tucked away out of sight up a side street that looks like the entrance to a London mews. It has a sense of rural quiet which is rare indeed in any town of considerable size that is so well known. The inroads made by commerce upon the surrounding district, the sweeping changes which at times have threatened the very existence of the sport for which its name has stood so long,

have almost passed it by. The advent of the railway has in one sense left it quieter than before; railways and motor cars have taken away much of its importance as a residential centre for hunting.

The tap-rooms of its hotels, where gatherings overnight discussed with keen anticipation the next morning's sport—Nimrod does not fail to mention the "George"—where glasses went round among such sportsmen as Mr. George Marriott of Melton, of whom it has been said "if the distance he has travelled over with hounds were to be measured by the yard, it would be found to exceed the circumference of the globe twice over," are now resorted to chiefly by their grooms. Commercial travellers with their account books and ink sit in gloomy absorption in the old parlours, where portraits of great huntsmen of the past look down on harassed individuals who are doing their best to sell somebody's blacking, or push a new line in dental cream.

The rider who appears in spotless pink coat to meet his car at Melton station has arrived from London by the morning express; the sportsman who breakfasts twenty miles away does not trouble about the clock until it records a bare thirty minutes to the hour of the meet. The hum of his car, throwing up the dust or driving through the mire of quiet by-ways, is the music that greets a hunting morning to-day.

But let us take a glance at Melton and the country round it, in order to appreciate its unique position as a hunting centre.

The river Eye, upon which the town stands, derives from the Belvoir highlands near Bescaby Oaks. At Stapleford it receives the Whissendine Brook and the Leesthorpe Brook, and runs a winding course—close to the derelict Melton and Oakham Canal—through the valley of the Eye, known as the Burton Flats. At Melton it receives the Scalford Brook, thereafter becoming the Wreake, which ultimately runs into the Soar, just east of Rothley. Exactly where the transformation occurs seems a matter of some doubt; the river remains the Eye as far as the Eye-Kettleby and Kirby-on-the-Wreake parish boundary, close to Melton, and would appear to become the Wreake after it has been joined by a small stream which flows by the parish boundary from Great Dalby.

In the days when there were only the old bridge and a level crossing over the railway some twenty-seven years ago, when the river was less effectively controlled, floods were not uncommon in the town, and boats plied in the streets. And even the flood records of old days were broken on August Bank-holiday in 1922, when nearly five inches of rain were recorded in fourteen hours. From Lower Leesthorpe the river could be seen

sweeping down in mighty flood upon Melton Mowbray, while the Scalford Brook poured its own flood into the Eye, and for the first time in memory inundated the northern part of the town. The climax was reached at midday, when the Burton End district was one vast flood, the railway lines being submerged for some distance towards Saxby. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, the casualties being confined to about a hundred head of poultry and

THE MELTON–NOTTINGHAM TURNPIKE.

one pig. Of exciting incidents and thrills, however, the holiday crowd had its full share. A wagonette carrying a large party was upset while trying to approach the station and its occupants were nearly drowned; about twenty horses liberated from Mr. Beeby's stables only reached safety after wading through water nearly up to their withers; and a heroic constable was rescued unconscious from the flood after an attempt to render assistance to others in difficulties.

Seen from the railway bridge, the broad street had the appearance of a torrent, and more than one of the boats engaged on rescue work were swamped.

All day a crowd watched the extraordinary spectacle, lined up along the churchyard wall.

Melton Church is fourth in size among the Leicestershire churches, and is certainly the most beautiful. The church is well placed, dominating not only the town, but also the immediate country-side. The tall trees, one of which is shown in the drawing reproduced on page 13, were lopped in 1921, as they became dangerous ; to-day the tower rises clear above them. Close to the bridge and almost opposite the church is the old " Harborough Arms "—incidentally there is a brick in the wall on which is cut a record showing the height of the 1880 flood, exceeded in 1922 by seven inches—and across the bridge, on the Oakham road, is the Hunting Club, Craven Lodge, to be referred to later.

The great advantage of Melton as a hunting centre to-day is its position at the junction of country hunted by the Quorn, the Cottesmore, and the Belvoir. The Quorn Mondays and Belvoir Wednesdays share for boundary, up to Abb-Kettleby, the Melton-Nottingham road. From the summit of the hill on this turnpike, one and a half miles out of Melton, it is possible to see the tops of the telegraph poles on the road between Melton and Scalford, close to which is one of the Belvoir's great possessions, Melton Spinney ; while a little further on, beyond the Waltham road, is the dark crest of Brentingby Wood. Looking back over Melton—sunk in its basin—and the Burton Flats, are Laxton's Covert and the park-side spinneys of the Cottesmore. To the south-west Burrough's steep bluff comes into view, where Friday Quorn and Saturday Cottesmore meet. Later chapters will deal in detail with the boundaries of these countries as they are fixed at the present time ; it is sufficient here to state that meets of the Belvoir and the Cottesmore, and of the Quorn on their Mondays and Fridays are held within a few miles of the town.

Leland's quaint reference to beans and peas being commonly found throughout Leicestershire, quoted at the head of this chapter, hardly describes a good hunting country, suggesting an area of small allotments ; but the bean-fields especially were large and numerous, and this fact, together with the mention of cornfields on Burrough Hill, proves that a great deal more land was under cultivation in his time than at present. Conversely, Otho Paget remarks, in his " Memories of the Shires," that it would be difficult to-day to follow a certain line without touching plough,* which an earlier writer describes as all grass. The balance, however, is completely in favour of hunting, and for reasons already stated the Melton country is mainly pasture.

* A number of fields were ploughed up during the war which have since returned to grass.

Apart from its fame as the Mecca of the hunting world, Melton is an agricultural town; it is also famous for pork-pies, and, according to guides, "A centre of the Stilton cheese industry." All these activities it manages to hide away unnoticed, except on its weekly market day. Then, every Tuesday, Melton is really alive; and as this market day coincides with the Cottesmore meets in their Tuesday country, not many miles away, it is a suitable occasion to view Melton at its busiest. Twentieth-century Melton, barely a hundred miles from London, flanked by two main-line railways, visited annually by sportsmen from all parts of the world—and to wake up there on a Tuesday morning one would think the hub of the universe turned on its booths and stalls, its cattle, sheep, and pigs, its busy townsfolk and concourse of farmers from the neighbouring villages.

Let anyone who does not know it take an imaginary breakfast at the George Hotel before seeing the sights of the town. The parlour is full, but not of sportsmen. There are two commercial travellers, one of them remarking that he "has heard there is some hunting round Melton." There is a family of motorists who arrived overnight, forced to put up there owing to a breakdown on the road. They are devotees of the map and guide-book, and quote from the latter during their meal. The daughter is most garrulous in the search for information, making the great discovery that a discoloured print upon the wall is "Bell Voir" Castle; when Father, his clothes still smelling of petrol after that struggle with the carburetter, informs her, with an anxious eye on the commercial travellers, that it is pronounced "Beevor." A very aged couple, also motorists, with a girl chauffeur, sit at another table. They have a certain element of sport, for they spend their declining years and hard-earned savings touring the country in a Ford. Their conversation concerns a large case of stuffed birds which adorns the room, in which they are proud to recognise at least three different species; and they also consult a guide-book. Their chauffeuse, obviously suffering from eye-strain, advises them on the day's route. They argue about the best way to approach some distant Spa to which their fancies are bent.

Great shades of the past! Was it here you discoursed of the oxers in the Vale, and made the table ring with your "view holloas" shouted again with all the lusty energy given by strong wine? Smashers of tobacconists' shop-windows! Was it here you bragged of your exploits when you had stabled your horses after a day's hunting followed up by a Grand National steeplechase home again?

Outside the parlour windows can be seen the stalls laden with cheap

crockery for which housewives are already bargaining. The farmers' gigs are closely packed in the yard, and droves of cattle go up the street. It is a hard day for the " George," and the boots—one of the best—is busy guiding the traffic into the yard, unharnessing the horses, and packing the traps away.

Meanwhile another personality has entered the parlour : Mr. W. Vahey, the pioneer of horse dentistry, arrived at Melton on an urgent summons. Mr. Vahey is a busy man ; it is his claim that, when a horse is out of condition, the first thing to look at is its mouth, and the success of his practice bears out his theory. Here is a man with a fund of reminiscence, who began his connection with horses as an assistant to the famous Buffalo Bill. He recounts how he watched the French animal painter, Rosa Bonheur, painting a portrait of his chief when the Wild West Show was in France, and, during his hurried breakfast, tells of many strange and interesting adventures. But the hands of the clock on the church tower point to the hour of his engagement. We will accompany him to the hunting stables at Craven Lodge.

While passing through the town towards the railway bridge and station, strings of second-horsemen go by on their way to the Cottesmore meet. Each groom leads a spare horse, and they have the appearance of a troop of cavalry. The sun shining above the church tower gleams on the smooth coats of the horses, the church itself rising dark against the sky, casting its shadow across the road as far as the opposite buildings. Small white clouds are scudding overhead, driven by a light wind. Behind, in the intricate streets, are the market booths and crowds of early purchasers ; in front is the broad road leading to the station and the bridge over the railway and the river. The Eye is crossed by two bridges in Melton, a second one leading out of the town on the road to Leicester.

Craven Lodge stands hidden among trees where the Oakham road rises on a slight gradient towards the village of Burton Lazars, a mile out of Melton. The house has been used as a hunting club since the war, somewhat on the lines of the Old Club described by Nimrod, though rather more spacious. Nimrod's description of the Old Club is interesting, not only as past history, but also as giving a good idea of the lines on which the present Club was formed. It is worthy of quotation :

" The grand feature at Melton Mowbray is the Old Club, which has been established about thirty-two years (he writes in 1825), and owes its birth to the following circumstance. Those distinguished sportsmen Lords Forester and Delamere (then Messrs. Forester and Cholmondeley) had been living for some years at Loughborough, for the purpose of hunting with Mr.

Meynell, and removed thence into Melton, where they took a house, and were joined by the late Mr. Smith Owen, of Condover Hall in Shropshire. As this house, now known by the name of the Old Club-House, only contains four best bedrooms, its members are restricted to that number; but the following Sportsmen have, at different periods, composed it: The Hon. George Germain (now Lord Sackville), Lords Alvanley and Brudenell, the Hon. Joshua Vanneck (now Lord Huntingfield), the Hon. Berkeley Craven, the late Sir Robert Leighton, the late Mr. Meyler, Messrs. Brommell, Vansittart, Thomas Assheton Smith, Lindo, Langston, Maxse, Maher, Moore, and Sir James Musgrave."

He goes on to say:

"There is something highly respectable in everything connected with the Old Melton Club. Not only is some of the best Society in England to be met with in their circle, but the members have been remarkable for living together on terms of the strictest harmony and friendship; and a sort of veneration has been paid by them to the recollection of the former members, as the following anecdote will prove. Not only is the same plate now in use which was purchased when the Club was established, but even trifles are regarded with a scrupulous observance. A small print of the late Samuel Chifney, on Baronet, was placed against the wall by the present Lord Sackville, then Mr. Germain—(so distinguished as a most excellent sportsman, as well as a rider over a country or over a race-course—in the later accomplishment, perhaps, scarcely excelled by any gentleman jockey)—and although since it was first affixed the room has undergone more than one papering and repairing, yet the same print, in the same frame, *and on the same nail*, still hangs in the same place."

The reader here pauses to take breath, or to disentangle the clauses in parentheses of this curious sentence, but the series of climaxes by which the point of the anecdote is reached give a pathetic note to "on the same nail." Such devotion to the memory of the past is really touching.

It is too early in the history of the Craven Lodge Club to record a list of names going back many years, but during its few seasons many of the most notable sportsmen who hunt in Leicestershire have stayed there, including the Prince of Wales and Prince Henry. The house has a large ball-room where many gatherings worthy of the past have assembled.

On entering the lodge gates, the long line of red-brick stables is evidence of the number of hunters that can be accommodated there. A separate block is set aside for the Prince of Wales's horses, standing some little distance from the main building.

RIDING HOME IN THE RAIN: H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES ON "HOW'S THAT"

Mr. Vahey's work takes him to one of the nearer boxes. The horse to be operated upon is gagged, and with formidable pliers the horse dentist cuts off the sharp projections of overgrown molars, which by lacerating the animal's mouth cause discomfort and loss of condition. The improvement effected in horses which have been operated upon is in many cases remarkable, and the trouble is certainly one of the chief causes of that indifferent condition which is often hard to account for. The regular practice of horse dentistry is a most important branch of veterinary science.

It might seem out of place to give a description of the Prince's stables at Craven Lodge, were they not proof of the keenness with which his Royal Highness does everything in connection with hunting, and of the personal interest he takes in all his horses. Here are stabled horses which have been to the fore in some of the stiffest runs in Leicestershire of recent years: Little Favourite, How's That, Just an Idea, and Tara are among those he most frequently rides. Shortly before a meet, his stud-groom receives a telegram giving the names of the horses which the Prince has selected for the day. The stables are built of red brick, like all those attached to the Lodge, but are distinguished from the others by the blue-painted buckets with the Prince of Wales's feathers on them, one to each box, and the cloths of his horses, with the letters E.P. in one corner; small details, but not unworthy to be included in an account of present-day Melton. They give a picturesque note to a somewhat prosaic scene, for the stables at Craven Lodge are not remarkable for their pictorial qualities.

There are hunting-boxes outside Melton which are rented each season, and they have also helped to draw hunting society away from the town. The number of visitors who come to hunt is increasing, but the crowd has yet to attain the enormous dimensions of the fields who attended pre-war Tuesdays, Fridays, or Saturdays, when five or six hundred riders would collect. War has changed many things, lessened incomes, increased taxes, and in consequence the old Melton society is to a certain extent changing too.

While on the Oakham road, we can view from the hill at Burton Lazars the Melton race-course, lying in the Eye valley. The course is intersected by the Burton Brook, which is, however, no longer used as an obstacle in the race on account of accidents which occurred there. Beyond the course and the white rails of the fences is Berry Gorse, and, further to the right, Leesthorpe Hill, mentioned in the first chapter. We are looking over the Saturday country of the Cottesmore.

Making a circuit of the town of Melton, towards Leicester, the second bridge over the Eye is reached, and two miles further on the main road is Kirby

Bellars. The Hall stands close to the road, and one of the prettiest meets to be seen is that which sometimes takes place here on a Quorn Friday. With the sun casting shadows across the square quadrangle in front of the house, the walls half covered with ivy, part in shade and part in light, the horses crowded on the roadway, and the scarlet coats, with the tall tower of the old priory a little distance below on the slope running down to the Wreake, we have a scene typical, not only of hunting, but also of all that is associated with it as a feature of English life—a picture that belongs to the past, as all hope it will equally belong to the future for many centuries to come.

CHAPTER III

HOUNDS! GENTLEMEN, PLEASE!

"In most other countries they boast of their breed,
For carrying at times such a beautiful head;
But these hounds to carry a head cannot fail,
And constantly too—for by George there's no tail.
Talk of horses, and hounds, and the system of kennel—
Give me Leicestershire Nags—and the hounds of OLD MEYNELL."

ROBERT LOWTH.

WHAT early writers on hunting would have said of a meet of foxhounds in the Shires to-day, if for a brief space they could come back and record their impressions, none can tell. Would they have marvelled at its magnificence, or have deplored a lack of that romance and elegance which roused Nimrod, in one of his expansive moments, to compare such an occasion with "Dido's party to the godlike Aeneas"? Would they have found words of admiration for the column of motors blocking half a mile of road, or have asked for the Master in his "barouche-and-four" and the ladies of the party who "never quitted their carriages"?

These questions the reader can attempt to answer at his leisure, in the way that pleases him best, but first he must see in his mind's eye the spectacle that is to be judged. Many will be able to visualise it without assistance; for those who cannot, this chapter attempts the task.

Whether it be a stormy day east of Melton, when clouds chased by a thundering wind pass over the Grantham road, and the skyline, cut by telegraph posts, seems to move with the gale; or one of those dismal downpours of rain that seem to reserve themselves for the open country where shelter there is none, at Widmerpool New Inn or Lodge-on-the-Wolds, when scarlet coats are quickly sodden to a dark hue, collars turned up, reins and saddles hard to grasp and grip; whether a thick fog slows down the cars and there is an ominous feeling of frost at Gaddesby or Thimble Hall; or the morning opens with a clear sky, roads that recall the dust of summer, and an exhilaration as of champagne in the air, when smoke goes up in lazy

spirals from Barrow-upon-Soar and hangs in a pale cloud over Leicester—the assemblage at the place of meeting is the same. Climatic conditions, so long as scent holds and there is no ice in the gateways to cut a horse's feet, are a minor consideration on a hunting morning.

But since there is no reason to endure discomfort at this imaginary meet, and colour will aid its description, a bright day is most appropriate. And so it opens—on any highway, anywhere in Leicestershire within the confines of its choicest country.

The scene is a grass-edged road ; the venue, a quiet village, with its church tower crisply cut by sun and shadow against a sky whose dome is flooded by slowly increasing silvery light, spacious, yet confined round the horizon by a dissolving mist, as the zenith changes from pearl grey to powder blue. There is not a cloud to be seen, only the mist warmed with the first light to roseate hues fading into purple, where a cold moon still glimmers above the trees. Mist and moon vanish as the sun chases the shadows away.

It is early and the scene is very still. Once a yellow-hammer, that gay and sprightly bird, darting along by the roadside, poises a moment on a thorn-twig. The gold of its head and breast flashing in the sun lights up the dark hedge. It remains poised, but for so short a space of time that its onward flight seems like a shaft of sunlight, and the picture of the bird a momentary caprice of sun and dew. On every thorn-branch there is a spangled glitter to which it gives a greater brilliance. Elsewhere nothing moves ; the shadows on the road imperceptibly shorten. The road surface is dry, but the grass by its edge is sodden and in the narrower lanes are pools of water. The going will be heavy, for it has been an open season with scarcely a touch of frost.

The village is about a quarter of a mile away, up a lane turning off the main thoroughfare. This lane is a rough track, bordered by broad strips of grass, and is also enclosed by thorn hedges, but they are at an early stage of growth since their last cutting. The stakes with ropes of twisted brier binding them together are plainly visible. These are typical Leicestershire fences, some years older than the newly-cut stake-and-bound. At the corner is a white sign-post with a single pointer in the direction of the village.

The vanguard of the approaching Hunt is a mounted groom with a led horse, who halts at the corner, pulls out his watch, and finding it is still early, takes a turn or two along the road. The air is keen in spite of the sunshine. Two riders in pink coats, also well ahead of the appointed hour, pass him and proceed on to the village. The church tower shines before

them, stolid and square-cut above the clustering houses. Here a white cottage, there a red-tiled roof, gleam in the sun.

A crisp sogging of hoofs treading the grass by the edge of the highway and their dull thud on the road surface draws nearer, and a long string of second-horsemen, each with a led horse, files down the road and turns the corner. Pair by pair the horses go past, some thirty of them, their clipped

THE MORNING SUN.

flanks and shining saddlery streaked by the shade of hedges, their breath blown past them in a dusty sheen. Bit-rings jingle and scuds of foam are flecked on to the grass. The grooms, some in dark livery with tall hats and cockades, others in drab coats and breeches, ride easily at the walk. They maintain their order like a well-drilled troop of cavalry, as perfectly turned-out as a crack cavalry regiment. Already the first contingent is followed by others, until nearly two hundred horses have gone past. At intervals their ranks are broken by small groups of people who are riding to the meet, sportsmen of the old school who hunt with two horses through a

season, hack to the meet and hack home again. A veteran on a grey horse is one of these, with glinting eyeglass, immaculately attired, fresh as paint; he will look much the same at the end of the day when he has lifted his horse over its last fences, "stained with the variations of each soil," and as likely as not be one of the first to join the hounds when the horn has blown the signal for home. Beside him rides the likeness of himself, well mounted on a chestnut horse, ready to fly or to scramble, to gallop or to stay, and he too wears an eyeglass.

Behind these two ride two young girls, both dressed alike, with wide-brimmed, low-crowned hats, and the morning sun in their faces. They ride sedately up the lane between ranks of second-horsemen, now standing beside their mounts, drawn up along the hedges, leaving the roadway clear for cars.

The quiet lane is crowded. The hedge on one side recedes in shadow through a blue haze steaming up from the breath of horses, through which can be seen the flash of steel, the shine of saddles, the ripple of muscle and sinew under smooth-clipped coats, the sun on a polished boot, a flame of scarlet, a hunting hat reflecting the light from its crown. The palpitating haze blows upward and radiates into the sky; shadows fade into it, lights are lost in its shimmer. The crowd is constantly fed by new arrivals. The grass is beaten into mud, from which the horses withdraw their feet with a soft, sucking sound. Some turn and twist or back into the hedge, standing with empty saddles; grooms readjust their order, but the throng presses. The width of the lane is expanded to bursting its hedges, but the riders pass on and the ranks of waiting horses are eased again.

Three children go by. A little boy with a large cap pulled down over his eyes rides a stout white pony bare-backed, gripping his pony's flanks like a man, urging it on with digs of his heels and flicks with a short whip—a thruster in the making. The other two are little girls, their faces shaded by hat-brims pulled down over long dark hair; the elder is on a full-sized hunter, her sister controls a skittish pony with the confidence born of experience almost from the cradle. They do not mind the crush. Wallop goes a small whip with a sharp word of reproof, and the spirited pony cocks up its ears and answers to the bridle; its rider tosses back her hair, looking eagerly ahead. The three make rapid progress, led by young Nimrod, whose white pony cleaves its way as though it would push under, if not past, the stately hunters that bar the road.

There are girls riding astride with tan breeches and fawn coats, and ladies

in all the elegance of top-hats and long habits, such as the old chroniclers might not have compared unfavourably with their forebears who only hunted from their landaus, with, no doubt, a parasol for such a sun as this. And here is a farmer on a raw-boned bay that takes its fences like a stag, landing with a thump into the next field; but it gets there, and its rider has seen many a fast burst with few pink coats in front of him.

Yet this is only a beginning. Round the corner comes the first of the cars. Through its windows a glimpse of scarlet hidden under a heavy fur coat merges in a vignette of the landscape darkly reflected in the glass panes. The car glides along the lane in the wake of the first riders. It is followed by another, and then many more, all swinging round the corner and rolling up to a standstill at the first vacant halting place. Forty or fifty great closed cars are soon drawn up, shining black monsters with roofs flashing back the sun. The smell of rubber and the reek of petrol blend with the exhalation from beaten earth, the tang of wet grass, and the mixed aroma of horse-hide and leather. The air in the lane is choking and warm to the face. In clearer spaces the sunlight seems cold, and the damp of the ground rises with a heavy chill, but the senses are braced by so much life and movement, the throb of it warms the blood. Through the air comes the crisp ring of voices, a cheerful greeting, a final command to a second-horseman. The doors of the cars have swung open. White cords and scarlet hunting coats set a new key to the kaleidoscope of colour, as wraps are thrown off, aprons discarded, and horses mounted.

The turn of the road is now crowded with vehicles. The corner is no longer visible; above the roofs of cars the sign-post is a white blur seen through fumes of petrol vapour. Looking down the ranks of cars, the stately Rolls-Royce is followed by the less stately Humber or Daimler, and these by the plebeian two-seater, and the two-seaters by the inevitable Ford. Some of the later vehicles are packed with mere holiday-makers—father, mother, schoolboy home for Christmas, and the family infant leaning out over the back—and enough food for twenty-four hours in hampers, bags, and tins. A wise provision for possible emergencies, for whatever happens, their owners intend to keep with hounds. There are dog-carts and traps, and anything on wheels with anything on legs between the shafts, and foot-people and cyclists.

This motley scene is only on the fringe, as it were, of the meet. The eager faces of the foot-people standing wherever there is an inch of room, watching the cars go past, light up as some well-known figure appears; they

make way as a car draws up swiftly and its occupants alight, gazing with admiration at the scarlet coats and spotless breeches, at the eager readiness of horses, the foot planted in the stirrup, and the easy swing into the saddle. But these onlookers are far from the centre of this great gathering, and to proceed there on foot is a matter of difficulty and danger. Most stay where they are, content with what they can see from a safe point of vantage.

Far up the lane, seen above the roofs of cars, are the heads and shoulders of scarlet-coated figures, bobbing hats, ladies' habits, the tossing heads of horses; order growing out of confusion as a stream of riders makes its way to the front.

As each rider mounts, viewed close against the sky, and the red of his coat meets the sun as he rises from among shadows of men and horses, the day seems to gain in brilliance. The lane lights up with a pageantry of colour. Against the pearly blue, above the topmost twigs of hedges, there comes into being a frieze of horsemen moving slowly on with rhythmic lines; colour accentuated by motion, and motion given a flickering animation by colour. The very shadows glow with reflected lights, blue from the sky empurpling the scarlet. Each figure in the frieze is but a momentary picture. Youth and Age are here. Youth reins up an impatient horse, fighting its bit, ears pricked and nostrils distended, the clean-cut head of a perfect hunter reined back with arched neck and flesh that trembles; Age follows behind him, firm in the saddle with keen eye undimmed. They pass and repass, their places taken by others. Ladies in dark blue habits with white cravats, their more sombre attire lit up by the freshness of fair faces; and all about them the creaking of leather and trampling of horses.

The spectators gaze at a throng which never ceases, for the frieze in its variation and yet conformity seems to go on for ever.

A description of an ordinary meet of hounds is given realism by detailing the various characters assembled, telling off each one with a few happy touches, perhaps verging on caricature to obtain relief. Such personages crowd the novels of Surtees and many hunting ballads. But the peculiar glory of a great meet in the Shires is its uniformity, the uniformity of scarlet. To look for characters distinct from the rest, who can be summed up in a few words, one must take the oddments, the trappings of such a throng, leaving the main assemblage to go in their glory undescribed—later, some may have an unwanted individuality, a bashed hat or back encumbered with the soil, but here they dare everything in a pristine splendour. Gods and goddesses, indeed, more than worthy of comparison with Dido entertaining Aeneas!

What a host of memories a meet of hounds calls up! For those who have hunted from childhood, through the middle periods of life, to mature age, for whom the sun has climbed to the meridian and slowly declined, what a long succession of occasions like this can be remembered!

The sight of children in the hunting field must recall to many those impressions that began with the nursery, with the pictures on the walls that roused their first enthusiasm so many decades ago. Perhaps a chair had to be climbed in order to look closely at the print which hung above the door. The first mounting-block, and a precarious one! To the writer at least one such picture occasioned many anxious moments lest the door should suddenly be opened before its details were fully grasped. The picture hung so tantalisingly high. The scene was a rolling field of plough, across which hounds were racing in a compact body, with "no tail," while a farmer was holding back two straining horses. The legend below the picture gave the words of an irate huntsman: "Hold hard! don't ye cross the scent."

The print was one of a series hanging round the room, each with liberal comments written on the margin to enliven the incidents depicted and stir the imagination. The whole set was an epitome of all that one should, or should not, do in the hunting field. The artist was caustic in his comments, as he was ingenious in devising predicaments for his unfortunate puppets. Terrible was the position of one unhappy man, lying on his back, the reins of his plunging horse held in one hand, and the thong of his crop, taut as a wire, in the other, its handle caught on a gate which an impatient crowd were endeavouring to open. "A podge at a gate by some of all sorts, mostly bad," was written beneath. Beside the gate, a flyer was taking some rails—he had literally taken one between his horse's forelegs—evoking the remark of his creator, "A good one, but behind from a fall and down again."

Well ahead of the rest, or nearly all, was the huntsman, adjured to "Go along, Bob! that pace will do the trick." But Bob was preceded by a real terror, whose horse had evidently slipped its tongue over the bit, and, with head in air, was charging the hounds. Even he was preceded by one more who had negotiated a stake-and-bound facing a yawning chasm, coming to grief in a series of somersaults.

And so around that nursery the chase went on, until the fox was eventually killed in a farmyard; fox, hounds, pigs, labourers with pitchforks and rakes, a couple of colts loosed from a field, and the thrusters of the hunt all joining in a scene of wild pandemonium. The background was filled by an inn, already surrounded by sportsmen more thirsty than ardent, in pink, blue,

and green coats of astonishing cut, the wonder of an admiring village crowd. Truly a scene to suit all tastes !

From such rude beginnings, which depicted the sportsmanship of an earlier day, has the ordered crowd of a modern meet descended.

And lest such scenes should be thought to savour of the unbridled imagination of an artist who knew little of hunting, we will examine for a moment the diary of a sportsman who loved his hounds and took his sport as it came—whether hare, rabbit, or fox, it was all the same to him. The famous John Peel is the prototype of such a man, but this diarist is not among the immortals. He kept a pack of hounds for the diversion of his friends, and hunted them for his and their enjoyment, without regard to rules. His methods were crude, but his heart was in the right place.

John Beard was a native of Gloucestershire, and but for the little book in which he recorded his daily sport for fifteen years (1796–1811), he would have been forgotten. Hunting literature of the stereotyped kind may pall—there is so much of it—but these naïve and simple pages are worthy of remembrance. They do not deal with Leicestershire, yet being comparatively unknown, and having much of the true spirit of hunting, they deserve quotation.

The author commences with a prefatory address :

" When the sport of the day was over ; when my friends had taken their departure for their several homes, and I was left to repose and recruit by my humble fireside, you know it was my customary task to scribble down the events of the chase ; state to what part of the surrounding country I had taken my faithful pack of harriers ; what diversion they had afforded ; what slaughter made ; and sometimes by whom I had been attended. There must appear too great similarity between the detail of one year's sport and that of the succeeding ; but I never intended that my Diary should have been seen beyond the circle of my own friends, and who perfectly knew every field, wood, common, hill, and dale we had ranged through and over. To them only will the perusal of these pages appear the least interesting. The good opinion of others I am not solicitous to acquire, knowing that I should be disappointed if I either expected their praise, or deprecated their censure, for thus obtruding myself on their notice as a writer.

" My reading has never extended beyond such books as might render a laborious yeoman a useful member of the small community in which he moved, and to such as should prepare him for a *state hereafter ;* excepting the perusal of publications that treated on the chief source of my amusement

NEAR ABB-KETTLEBY

in this life—the *Recreation of Hunting;* amongst those the honest, poetic Somerville was my most favourite author—from his pages it will be seen that I have made some liberal quotations; and I beg leave to finish this address by another apposite extract from the same descriptive pen:

"Now golden autumn, from her open lap,
Her fragrant bounties show'rs; the fields are shorn;
Inward smiling, the proud Farmer views
The rising Pyramids that grace his yard,
And counts his large increase; his barns are stored,
And groaning staddles bend beneath their load.
All now is free as air, and the gay pack,
In the rough bristly stubble, range unblamed;
No Widow's tears o'erflow, no secret curse
Swells in the Farmer's breast, which his pale lips
Trembling conceal, by his fierce Landlord aw'd;
But courteous now, he levels every fence,
Joins in the common cry, and halloos loud,
Charmed with the rattling thunder of the field."

There is more, but the poet gets long-winded; the picture of the farmer is enough—he has evidently been amply rewarded for allowing the hounds to hunt over his land; his "inward smile" means much, and the care with which he "levels his fences."

The diarist warned his readers of a certain monotony in his records of the chase; a few will suffice:

"*March 2nd.*—This day hunted at Sopworth, where many hares were hunted; only one was killed and well saved. A very good day's sport.

"*March 7th.*—Threw off on Mr. Arnold's farm, where we soon found. After hunting several hares, one was killed and well saved. A very good day's sport.

"*March 14th.*—Threw off beyond Burton, where three hares were well hunted, killed and saved. Most famous sport; quite equal to the preceding day.

"*April 11th.*—Went this day to Cullern Park, in order to air the hounds, where we soon started a hare, we unkennelled a fox, that ran in the same cover a considerable time before he broke away; after a chase of about three miles of good hunting and hard riding he went to earth. Then we bolted a rabbit, that ran several fields, and she went to earth; and in coming home a stout young hare met us in the road that after running in view for half a mile, was killed. It was more like a course than a hunt."

Oh Mr. Beard! and you write later of the trouble and anxious thought you have expended on the training of your hounds.

The hares killed, when "well saved," were reserved for the larder. On the subject of hares the diarist says: "We found very plenty, particularly where we hunted most; but they seemed not to run so strong in March as they did in December, owing as it seems many of them were not sound in their livers."

Mr. Beard appears to have had some misgivings over the loose behaviour of his hounds, and to have been subjected to criticism. He was much worried that they did not carry a good head, and gave some attention to breeding, selecting the best hounds for this purpose and destroying the indifferent ones.

"It has been hinted to me that my beagles were not level, that is, they do not pack well together. Some days they seem not to run as well as I could wish; but where the fields are small, and the fences near together, I think no hounds can pack well, it's impossible for them to get through or over the bounds all in a body. Some young hounds I have, and some I intend to breed; and within three months, I have hanged and parted with five couples of hounds, in order to make them more level. In an open country hounds may be had to pack well together, by rearing many young ones yearly, but that is attended with considerable expense. According to Tickell, I have parted with some of the kind he condemns.

"Some hounds, of manners vile (not less we find
Of fops in hounds than in the reas'ning kind),
Puff'd with conceit run gadding o'er the plain,
And from the scent divert the wiser train,
For the foe's footsteps fondly snuff their own,
And mar the music with their senseless tone,
Start as the starting prey, or rustling wind,
And, hot at first, inglorious lag behind;
A falt'ring tribe, may such my foes disgrace:
Give me, Ye Gods! to breed the nobler race;
Nor give those to attend with truth unknown
I sing, and make Athenian arts our own."

"After pointing out the bad faults in hounds, he gives us some of the good properties that hounds ought to possess.

"Such be the dog I charge thou meanst to train,
His back is crooked and his belly plain,
Of fillets stretched and huge of haunch behind,
A tap'ring tail that nimbly cuts the wind,
Truss thigh'd, straight hamm'd and fox-like joined his paw.
Large legg'd, dry soled; and of protended claw;
His flat-wide nostrils snuff the sav'ry stream,
And from his eye he shoots pernicious gleam;

Middling his head, and prone to earth his view,
With ears and chest that dash the morning dew;
He best to stem the flood and leap the bounds,
And charm the Dryad with his voice profound,
To pay large tribute to his weary lord,
And crown the Sylvan heroe's plenteous board."

Only once does Mr. Beard attempt a sustained flight of prose. He has a few pages left at the end of his diary and wishes to write something " relative to the antiquity and innocence of Hunting." One might withhold its quotation here as irrelevant, but as it is short, and being its author's one and only effort in this direction, over which he must have taken a great deal of pains—perhaps after a most glorious day's sport, with many hares well saved upon his larder shelf—it shall be quoted in full. Let those who smile reflect on the good Mr. Beard, worrying over his attempts to improve his hounds, but happy in the thought that his mare had " been all through the season remarkably stout, never carried me better," and that the huntsman's horse " had carried George as well as usual all the winter, without being sick or lame," and forgive him for the platitudes of his final peroration.

" The antiquity of this innocent and rational diversion, and manly exercise, may be traced back to the first institution of human Society. These exercises and diversions, indeed, existed in the world long before those States were formed, who afterwards made so great a figure in history, although even under them, they were considered as honourable, and no way beneath the character of the greatest men and heroes. The vital and active principle, which leads us to the practice of innocent diversions, is one of the noblest that can actuate the heart of man, namely, emulation; while the consequences resulting from them are more important than some will believe, or others acknowledge; for while they furnish a relaxation from the toils of business, and an alleviation of the cares of life, they add vigour to the mind, health to the body, and, in conformity with the delightful variations of the seasons, mix our pains and pleasures together for the most salutary end.

" In the infant state of Society, the exercise of hunting was found necessary to support individuals and their families.

" What was practised from motives of necessity in the early ages of the world, was encouraged in more enlightened States, that youth might be habituated in manly exercises, in order to wean them from that effeminacy which in a state of indolence would have bewitched their minds, and enervated their bodies.

" I shall only relate what a great genius has told us, that it is:

"'Better to hunt in fields for health unbought,
Than fee the doctor for a nauseous draught.'

"Here I shall close my Diary, but not without thanking Providence for sending me health and strength to enable me to attend the hunt every day the hounds went out through the season."

Such a man as our diarist was the famous John Peel. He was not exactly a huntsman, though he could hardly be called a Master of Hounds, yet for fifty-five years he kept, entirely at his own expense, a pack of some twelve couples, which he hunted and whipped-in himself, till his son was old enough to act as whipper-in. The pack was composed of mongrels of all sizes and shapes, but it was a wonderful pack for work. It was John Peel's boast that they would hunt everything from a rabbit to a sheep, though hares and foxes were their usual quarry. Over the Cumberland dales it was often impossible to ride, and many of the followers were on foot. But Peel knew his country and was seldom at fault as to the line a fox would take; that he killed his foxes under such conditions was very much to the credit of hounds and huntsman. Foxes in the dales were considered as vermin on account of their preying on young lambs, and Peel and his hounds meant business when they got on the line.

Herein is the secret of fox-hunting. If hounds do not kill their foxes, breed and shape, a good head and no tail, all the perfections of a modern pack are wasted. It is the business of a good huntsman to account for his fox, not the privilege of the fox to escape after he has shown sport to some few hundred ardent horsemen. It is a hard saying, but therein rests the permanence of fox-hunting, and for that end only are the points of a perfect hound.

Nimrod is quaintly informing on the subject:

"On few occasions—not even in a ballroom—is the word 'beauty' more often made use of than in a kennel of highly-bred foxhounds; nor, indeed, is it often more appropriately applied. To imagine that the Almighty adorns merely for the sake of ornament, would be either to suppose that He amused Himself with an ostentation of His powers, or to put Him on a level with man; whereas in the animal world, the justness and elegance of the figure—to say nothing of the colours in which it is arrayed—confer upon them the qualities we require, and are necessary to the very ends of their creation; to them are they (hounds in particular) indebted for strength, agility, and speed. 'What,' says a certain writer, 'is beauty, but a necessary result of the aptitude of forms to the offices for which they were designed?'"

The fame of John Peel has been kept alive by the hunting song that was written by his friend, John Woodcock Graves, in Peel's little parlour at Caldbeck among the Cumbrian hills. But for the happy thought of a winter's evening, Peel would have been comparatively unknown, with the other Johns, John Beard and John Corbet and their like, for he was one of a type with no greater qualifications for immortality than they.

The song was written with the pen and ink kept for hunting appointments on Peel's table, written impromptu in the Cumbrian dialect, and recited to him with the comment, " By Jove, Peel, you'll be sung when we're both run to earth ! "

This digression may fitly be closed with the original version as it was transcribed later by its author into common English, quoted in full in Thormanby's " Kings of the Hunting Field." The chorus is too well known for quotation, but the slight variations in the words of the song itself from the modern version * are worth recalling :

" D'ye ken John Peel with his coat so grey?
D'ye ken John Peel at the break of day?
D'ye ken John Peel when he's far, far away
With his hounds and his horn in the morning?

" D'ye ken that bitch whose tongue is death?
D'ye ken her sons of peerless faith?
D'ye ken that a fox with his last breath
Curs'd them all as he died in the morning?

" Yes, I ken John Peel and auld Ruby, too,
Ranter and Royal and Bellman as true,
From the drag to the chase, and the chase to the view,
From the view to the death in the morning.

" And I've followed John Peel both often and far,
O'er the rasper fence, and the gate and the bar,
From low Denton-holme up to Scratchmere Scar,
When we vied for the brush in the morning.

" Then, here's to John Peel with my heart and soul,
Come fill—fill to him another strong bowl;
And we'll follow John Peel thro' fair and thro' foul
When we're wak'd by his horn in the morning."

" Hounds ! Gentlemen, please ! "—we are back in the present, at the

* In the third verse the word " find " is now generally substituted for " drag ": the old method of hunting followed by John Peel was to lay hounds on the drag left by a fox overnight. The fourth verse is often omitted.

end of the lane where it joins the village at four cross-roads, back among the crush of riders in the brilliant winter sunlight.

Ghosts evoked from the yellow pages of old diaries and the echoes of old songs fade away, as the winding of their horns was lost among Gloucestershire meadows and Cumberland dales. They have galloped with their hounds into the mists of forgetfulness.

And round the corner of the village street comes the Hunt—that wonderful sight, a modern pack, the huntsman, and the whips.

Hounds have arrived, and all the crowd in the lane—motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists—are left to disentangle themselves as best they can; second horsemen to get clear of waiting cars, spectators and would-be followers to scramble for a place in front where they can gaze at what they have come out to see, and those who have seen enough, to find some means of exit from the press to their various businesses and homes. Here, in the village itself, anyone who is not on a horse is as the dust of the earth.

Has ever painter done justice to the scene which heralds the departure of hounds for covert, followed by the close-ranked procession of perhaps four hundred horsemen? For colour alone, on a bright day, the assembly is second to none—and what a quality of colour! The clean English sunlight—for it has a quality peculiarly English, something of the freshness of grass and the quiet beauty of woods and fields is reflected into it—bears no comparison with the glare of southern lands. Colour is tempered here to a harmony that rests the eye; only the scarlet punctuates it as the notes of a trumpet wake an orchestra to life and brilliance above the music of the strings. The scene is mellow with tones of gold and emerald that deepen to russet shadows: the hues of the fields, the hedgerows and the leafless trees do indeed tell of the South, but of the warm, glowing colour associated with Florentine or Umbrian pictures.

There is a vibrant quality in the air, responded to by men and horses alike, the quality that breeds impatience for the first rush over the open fields and the challenge of the fences.

The hounds are assembled on a strip of grass beside the road, a mottled group of tan and white, their feathered sterns crimped above their shapely quarters, their straight forelegs stoutly supporting their deep chests, their wise old faces curiously quiet, lit by eyes that seem to smoulder. Some nose the ground, others squat on their haunches; a few wanderers are sharply recalled to their places. They wait; and all the energy hidden within them bides its time.

The huntsman and whips stand like equestrian statues, their faces grave, their eyes on the hounds; in them, too, the vigour for the work in hand is hidden by an outward calm. Their dignity is part of their calling, as immemorial as the sport they follow. Much talk is there around them, but they are silent.

The Master himself—who shall say what he is thinking? a cheery greeting for friends, a smile of acknowledgment to a morning salute, but beyond that the same calm preparation for the business of the day. His is the responsibility to show the best sport he can to the multitude grouped round him: the men eager to ride, the old sportsmen with memories of the past eager to hunt, all the mixed crowd who have come from far and near to forget

ON THE TILTON RIDGE.

everything but this great occasion, to follow hounds as their courage, their ability, or their horses will permit them to do. Emulation is not the least of the qualities that will urge them on.

And now they are moving. As though electrified, the pack has taken the road; the blue caps and scarlet coats of huntsman and whips bob up and down between walls of men and horses. The walls close up behind them. As far as eye can see the road is packed with a steady stream of moving figures, a scarlet stream interspersed with black, rippling down its whole length with the motion of horse and rider.

On they come, three or four abreast, a few jog-trotting on the verge to catch up friends in front while there is yet space to pass along the line. Here are hunters such as no other country can show; horses that can jump and gallop, and keep on galloping—it is the pace that tells in these grass countries, and a

horse that will go well anywhere else may fail here because of it. There have been many fine jumpers which have performed well in the Provinces, and yet failed in the Shires. They fail because the extra turn of speed demanded is too much for them. Not only must a horse be in tip-top condition to gallop over High Leicestershire, but it must be able to keep going and take its fences at a pace which seldom slackens in a fast thing, when hounds race from field to field, and it is all that the best horse can do to keep up with them. The horses now going past are to the ordinary hunter what a Grand National 'chaser is to the average horse between the flags. And a very brave show they make in the sunlight: chestnuts and bays and browns; Irish horses, many of them, and many from the same stock as " National " winners. There is the young horse, a shade too impetuous, fretting itself into a lather, and the old, seasoned hunter, sedate, but with ears cocked forward to catch the slightest sound.

The hedges on either side of the road are lined with villagers, among them old men who have seen the same Hunt under many Masters, and who can retail anecdotes that seem almost prehistoric in relation to hunting. There was a time when villagers once assisted to eject a very obstinate fox from covert, acting as beaters—Nimrod mentions the story, incredible as it may seem—and were unwisely paid for their services. Thereafter, on more than one occasion a vast crowd surrounded the covert and demanded payment, pressing their unwanted assistance! Some inhabitants of Leicestershire villages seem to live in a past age. At the present day an inn-keeper has been discovered who did not know how to use a telephone. But all are eager to watch the hunt, and to-day there is an added attraction.

As the riders pass, a little cheer goes up—first some way back, then nearer. A spontaneous " There he is! " echoes through the crowd. A scarlet-coated figure salutes as he passes, smiles, and rides on. He is soon lost among the other horsemen, but the line of sunlit faces have had their glimpse of him. A press photographer has been baulked by a woman with a baby in arms who pushed forward at the critical moment; children and young girls follow the retreating figure until he is out of sight. They dearly love to see the Prince of Wales.

The main body of the field is followed by a few late arrivals, then by the cavalcade of second horsemen, who take nearly as long to go past as the Hunt itself.

Afterwards the rattle of hoofs is followed by the whir of engines and the sound of wheels. The mixed crowd of vehicles at the end of the lane have

driven past the large cars, accompanied by men and boys who run beside them, and bolder spirits who jump on to the carriers behind; their drivers knock the engines and grind the gears in an effort to avoid ramming those in front. Few people enjoy the morning more than three little boys, one on either side of an iron luggage grid, and the centre of the group clinging to the spare wheel of a large and rather ancient car. Every few minutes an impatient pony following behind, in the shafts of a red-wheeled dogcart, nearly drives them from their perch, but they take their joy ride without fear of being trampled underfoot.

Once clear of the village, the Hunt swings to the right along a straight field-road up a gradual incline; through a couple of gates, already held open in expectation of their arrival, and on to the summit of the hill, whence the ground slopes away to a vale bathed in sunlight. Across the vale, on the opposite slope, a dark, irregular mass, cresting the rise at its far end, is the first covert to be drawn. The approach to it is across a couple of fields, broad acres receding through a haze to where the shadow of the wood is outlined on the grass.

The hounds once through the boundary gate, the field spreads out, and at a jog trot or gentle canter descends the slope. Shadows of horse and rider skim over the turf; the tramping of hoofs on the road is changed to a soft throb, a sound rising and falling as echoes of the more distant hoof-beats merge with the dull drumming of those near at hand. The mass of colour which poured in a long stream between the hedges is now scattered like flickering sparks over half a valley—black, scarlet, and white—gradually converging to an appointed place on the shadow side of the covert. It is wonderful how quickly a mass of horsemen, once gathered together in a body, can disappear. The scene of animation lasts but a short while, and then the fields are empty except for a dull blur of red beside the wood.

One of the gate-openers is following them on foot. Clad in an old hunting coat, he runs, a solitary figure, across the grass. He will follow thus through the day, always at the same occupation of opening and closing gates—it is his livelihood while the season lasts.

In the quiet shadow by the wood the field waits. Above them is the thin tracery of trees against the sky. A few larches with low-hanging, feathery branches and tall stems stand out above the lower growth. The deep shade of the wood gleams here and there with shafts of sunshine penetrating from above. Close packed as the riders are, the view is everywhere bounded by figures near at hand. The head of a white horse gleams in a chance ray;

a scarlet coat is streaked with flecks of light; a top hat flashes the sun from its crown; deep pools of shadow are moulded to the shape of horses' quarters, powdered with a dusty sheen; a stirrup-iron glitters or a boot reflects pale tones from the sky. Each man sees the face of his neighbour expectant like his own. A horse snorts and flings up its head, tossing a fleck of foam on to the grass. But for an impatient pawing of hoofs scraping the earth, there is scarcely a sound.

All is tense. Some riders peer through the trees, where the feathery sterns of a hound or two shine for a moment and disappear. The outside world is forgotten by this shadow-haunted margin of the wood.

Minutes seem hours. The silence oppresses. A twig cracking sets the throng in restless motion. Horses change places; one or two riders move slowly round the outskirts of the group. What seems an age passes; perhaps, after all, the covert will be drawn blank.

An echo comes from a far-off corner of the wood—the low whimper of a hound. An electric wave seems to pass through the crowd. There is an instant springing to attention. The sound comes again. The crowd seems to move as one, slightly in the direction whence it came; but the air is again strangely still.

Then, bursting on the ears with a vehemence as if deafness were suddenly removed, is heard that peal of music that sends a thrill through every man and horse. There is a low crashing through the wood. A far-off halloa up the road that puts an end to all suspense.

For the next few seconds no sound is heard but the drumming of hoofs, the jostling together of horses and the scudding of turf. They're away!

Round the covert they go like the Derby at Tattenham Corner—some take the first hedge, some take the open gate; and then they spread out and ride. A passing glimpse of the crowd on the road, second-horsemen and cars; a fleeting glimpse of that white streak two fields away, the hounds. And then the country broadens out before them, spanned by the lines of the fences. The covert is left behind, the road is left behind, the landscape changes from hill to vale, and vale to hill.

The rattle of hoofs sounding through the first mad rush becomes for those in the foremost flight a dull droning which gradually lessens as the leading riders string out; for them the air is punctuated only by the hoof-beats beneath them, the dry brushing through hedges, and the occasional crack of a rail. Once or twice there comes a dull, heavy crash that tells of disaster, a sharp exclamation, and perhaps the loose gallop, sounding out of rhythm

A LADY COMES TO GRIEF

with the rest, of a riderless horse. But all these pass as in a dream, a dream with its background of swiftly-moving grass like a torrent of green water appearing as though it would engulf everything in its course, and apparently spanned by dark barriers which approach, loom large, and are suddenly left behind in the delirious swing of the leap.

It is a wonderful dream; the exaltation of it is in its rhythm—the rhythm of horse and rider moving as one; it has the thrill of music, where a false step would be as discordant as a bar out of time. The dance itself has not so perfect a beat as the beat of a horse's gallop when it settles down to its stride; and no dance partners were ever more in unison together than the performers in this partnership between man and horse.

There is only one cloud to mar the sunshine, the cloud that shadows all dreams—how long will it last?

PART II

THE QUORN

CHAPTER I

MONDAY COUNTRY

"Much of the Monday country, which lies north of the Wreake, is at its best near Melton, though the farther north we travel, the rougher, the wilder, and the deeper becomes the character of the district."—T. F. DALE.

BEFORE reviewing in detail the four areas into which the country hunted by the Quorn is divided—areas reserved for their Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday meets—it will be well to give some idea of the extent of Quorn territory.

Roughly speaking, the whole of the Quorn country is enclosed by the following boundary. The boundary runs south from Melton Mowbray to Billesdon, where it includes the Coplow; west from Billesdon to Leicester, following the Leicester-Uppingham turnpike; from Leicester it runs south again, enclosing Narborough, then almost due north to Kirby Muxloe, thence north-west to Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Running north from Ashby, by Melbourne, the line makes an incursion west as far as Swarkeston, where it turns sharply to the east, following the course of the Trent in a north-easterly direction by Shardlow to within a few miles of Nottingham; it turns south again beyond Clifton, bearing west at Ruddington to Colston Basset, whence it runs south through the Belvoir Vale by Nether Broughton and Abb-Kettleby to Melton Mowbray.

The whole of this territory is in Leicestershire, with the exception of its extreme northern position. The Notts boundary runs south-east of Long Eaton to Rempstone, and makes a sharp descent southward to Six Hills, where it turns sharp north again, bearing east of Broughton; thus a part of South Notts is included in the Quorn Monday and Saturday countries. Having made this distinction, it will not be necessary to refer to it again, the hunt boundary being more important here than that of the county.

The four sub-divisions of Quorn territory include their two best countries, where Monday and Friday meets are held, both lying east of the line Leicester-Loughborough-Nottingham; the Monday country being north of the Wreake

Valley and the Friday country south of it. The Tuesday and Saturday countries are west of the above line, the former south, and the latter north of the Loughborough-Ashby road. The Tuesday country comprises Charn-

LOOKING TOWARDS SIX HILLS FROM SHOBY CROSS-ROADS.

wood Forest, and the Saturday country some of the coal areas of Northern Leicestershire.

The whole of Quorn Monday country is wold country west of the Fosse Way, running from Leicester (the Roman town of Ratae) through Six Hills into Notts, and north-west of the Valley of the Wreake, also east of the Fosse Way up to the north-east confines of the Belvoir Vale. From Six Hills to

the high ground above the Wreake past the Thrussington road, including Ragdale, the wold-like characteristics continue; but the remainder of the country, though high, can hardly be described as wolds, and is not so on the maps.

The Wolds (weald, would, wood or forest) were once thickly wooded, a wild, uninhabited tract of country extending from Charnwood to Sherwood Forest, and far to the north. To-day they are fine rolling uplands, second only to the Friday territory as an ideal hunting country.

The Monday country may be divided physically into three areas: the Melton district, the Vale, and the Wolds; though from a hunting point of view no such distinction is made between them. The character of the Friday country has been briefly described in the first chapter of Part One, as due to the slope of the main watershed and tributary streams of the larger rivers which have furrowed it into valleys. The general trend of these streams is south-east to north-west. In the Monday Quorn the country is for the most part similar, but on a less imposing scale, and the main trend of the streams is north-east to south-west; the valleys are shallower and the corresponding ridges lower. Many of the streamlets are negligible, in fact the Monday country has very little water-jumping. It is occasionally stiff, but usually an ocean of grass easy to ride over.

The district near Melton is most reminiscent of the Friday Quorn on a smaller scale, and this extends to the confines of the Vale and the Wolds. The "Quorn" Belvoir Vale lies below Broughton Hill, bounded on the east by Belvoir country, and is comparatively small in extent. The features of the Wolds have already been indicated; they form the remainder of the Monday Quorn.

A description of the country in detail can best be followed by taking its three physical features in the order named.

First, it is as well to indicate briefly the confines of the Monday country as distinct from the hunt boundary, though following it for part of their course. A start may this time be made north from Melton to Abb-Kettleby (Nottingham high road), thence up to the Belvoir covert Holwell Mouth, and then along the course of the Smite almost to Colston Basset; thence to the four cross-ways north of Owthorpe Borders, including Lord Manver's Plantation just below Cotgrave Wolds. The boundary then passes through Normanton and Plumtree. Here the line deviates from the hunt boundary, following the division between Quorn Monday and Saturday countries, south to east of Rancliffe Wood, south-west of Widmerpool, one mile east of Wymeswold,

and then between Prestwold and Burton. The line now becomes the boundary of Quorn Tuesday country, running half a mile west of Walton-on-the-Wolds, thence between Seagrave and the railway, then south-west to include Sileby and Cossington, up to Syston. Thereafter the division between Quorn Mondays and Fridays follows the course of the Wreake to Melton.

As already mentioned in a previous chapter, the Quorn and the Belvoir share the Melton-Nottingham road for boundary up to Abb-Kettleby. The village is three miles from Melton ; the prefix to its name (spelt here as it is on local sign-posts with a double " b ") is derived from the Abbey of Launde, to which it belonged. Between this village and Melton a good impression can be obtained of a large part of the Monday Quorn, a country less spacious than the Friday, of fewer trees and smaller woods. There are a few ploughed fields, but grass is predominant in fields of moderate size, though in places their areas are extensive.

This table-land, for such it is, that rears itself to the north of the Valley of the Wreake, is broken by a succession of the miniature valleys and their corresponding ridges already referred to. It has a quiet, rural character rather than the sublimity of the country near the heights of the watershed, and its woods are not so often the dramatic climaxes that they are in the far-ranging Friday Quorn and the Cottesmore countries adjoining it. The Belvoir country, on the other side of the boundary road, is identical.

The first Quorn fence over the road is typical of many around—a stake-and-bound, not too high and not too stiff. It is guarded by old " ox-posts." Many of these fences are not sound and are repaired in places with rails. Here and there are bullfinches, straggling fences that will some day be " laid," but war and poverty have left hedges untrimmed, ditches blind and uncared for. Parts of the immediate country are, however, very stiff, notably some of the enclosures round Welby Osiers, one and a half miles on the Melton side of Abb-Kettleby. A short burst of twenty minutes has emptied many saddles in this district, when a fox has breasted the hill from the Osiers and circled round towards Asfordby and Melton.

The Osiers are approached by a field-road, leading also to a variety of rural destinations. A branch from it turns off to Welby Grange, lying half-way down the hill, at the bottom of which is the mineral railway to Holwell Ironworks and a brook that runs alongside it, ultimately to join the Wreake. The history of Welby Grange is remarkable, and being little known is worth a short digression.

In old writings the Manor is variously styled Aleby, Oleby and Welby ;

WELLBY OSIERS

possibly the latter name is a corruption of Wealdby, signifying a town on the weald or wold. Its late owners, the Welbys, purchased it on account of its bearing their name. In the reign of Edward III John de Segrave, James Beless and John de la Touch held lands here. In the reign of Henry VII the Manor of Welby was held by a family named Sheldon, whose heiress carried it by marriage to Rowland Digby, fifth son of Sir Everard Digby. The heiress of Digby sold it to a merchant of London, named Sir John Bennet, whose heiress, Elizabeth Bennet, dying in 1751, left Welby to her cousin, Chiverton Hartopp of Quorndon, son of Sir Thomas Hartopp of Rotherby. Chiverton Hartopp died in 1759. His daughter and heiress, Mary, who in 1758 had married the celebrated admiral, Lord Howe of Langar (Notts), took Welby at her father's death. The property was sold by the Howes to Peter Godfrey, Esq., some time previous to 1790. The estate was purchased by the Welbys from the Godfreys about 1841. The old Manor-House, the residence of the farmer owners, which stood near the church, was pulled down about this time, and the materials were used for building farm-houses and cottages. The monuments to Sir John Bennet and Chiverton Hartopp, who both resided here, are in the south transept of Melton church. The Howes probably never made Welby their residence. Lord Howe is buried at Langar. In the church at Abb-Kettleby is a tablet to the aforementioned Everard Digby, and probably Rowland Digby is also buried there.

The grandfather of the present tenants, Mr. Hanbury, and his sister, removed the original farm-house—built from the stones of the old Manor—from the hollow of the stream to its present site, two-thirds of the way up the eastern slope, where it now stands as Welby Grange. The incentive to move it, which removal took place seventy-five years ago, was the plague of rats that haunted the stream, though possibly the fact that the house was away from the farm buildings, which were already on the slope, was a further inducement. In a stone outbuilding attached to Welby Grange is part of a fine stone top to an old fireplace such as might have belonged to a hall, and no doubt came from the Manor. It is now built into an outside wall, where it stands in relief.

The parish of Welby consists of an old church and two joint cottages—built on the site of the old Manor, and judging from their massive proportions probably a part of it—one other cottage, and four farms and their houses, including the Grange. The whole field where the Manor stood appears to have been built over, for it is difficult to dig a hole without coming on pavements.

Welby is now owned by Mr. William Wood of Rearsby. The father of the present tenant helped to plant the osiers in what are sometimes still known as Welby Fish Ponds. In the Ordnance Survey of 1884, however, the covert is marked as Wilton's Gorse, but in Combe's map of 1834 it is unnamed. Old men in the district can still recall scything corn where the blackthorn and privet grow in the upper part of Welby Osier Beds. It is a secretive covert, hugging the lowest slope of the hill and merging in the brook at the bottom, which later passes the more noticeable Cant's Thorns. Behind the Osier Beds the hill rises in a succession of green fields, enclosed by sporting fences with many rails.

We must now leave the spot and approach it from another direction, in order to get a more comprehensive view of this part of the Monday country.

Leaving Abb-Kettleby and bearing to the right, Holwell Mouth is reached, a well-known Belvoir covert. Up to 1891, Holwell Mouth and Grimstone Gorse were coverts neutral to the Belvoir and the Quorn. Then an agreement was made by which the Belvoir gave up the right to draw Grimstone Gorse and the Quorn to draw Holwell Mouth. The country round Grimstone Gorse belonged to the Belvoir when the covert was planted.

Here the steep Broughton Hill descends into the Vale of Belvoir, affording a view equal to, if not finer than, that seen from Burrough heights. The road runs down the hill, winding its way to Nether Broughton, in the Vale, and to Upper Broughton, some three and a half miles further, climbing the opposing slopes into the country of the Wolds. To this point we shall return as a gate to the Wolds, and also a starting point for the Vale, but having seen the trees of Wartnaby Stone-pits and beyond the dark woods of Little Belvoir, we take the first turn to the right over Green Hill, leading back to the Monday country lying nearer Melton. The Vale ends at Dalby-on-the-Wolds (Old Dalby), a village lying on the ascending slopes of the hill. The name in brackets, by which it is generally known, is a corruption of Wold Dalby. It is the most picturesquely placed village in Leicestershire, but, unlike many others, has a disappointing church unworthy of so fine a situation. The Hall, hidden among tall trees, is a popular Monday meet, and many are the runs which have started here and eventually come back to it. Many times has a hard-pressed fox slipped through the gardens, and on up the slopes of Dalby Wood, and many times have labouring horses breasted these slopes from the low country of the Vale. The road over Green Hill is a rough one, leading up, under a bridge over which the mineral railway descends to Old

Dalby, to the Little Belvoir and Six Hills road. Wartnaby Stone-pits lie on the left, set in a large ploughed field, a wind soughing through the trees. Seen in this dark wooded landscape, the white steam from a quarry engine has the touch of snow. Here a road turns off to Wartnaby, with its winding lanes and houses of red brick with tiled roofs, and the ancient ironstone church, both so characteristic of these upland hamlets. Wartnaby Hall, above whose

A CUB STANDS FOR HIS PORTRAIT.

ivy-clad walls rise spiral Tudor chimneys, stands among tall trees and evergreens. Following a field road running to Glebe Farm, Saxelby village, and Grimstone Station, on the left-hand side of an adjacent ridge is a slope on which can again be seen the top part of Cant's Thorns, and below which—in the dip—lie Welby Osier Beds. On the right-hand side is the valley containing Wartnaby Fish Pool, and beyond, on the next ridge, is the road from Saxelby to Nether Broughton, passing back over Green Hill.

Up the slope beneath this road rises Saxelby Wood, with Marriott's Spinney below it on the level. Just beyond is Grimstone Gorse on the railway tunnel

in the Saxelby Valley, with Grimstone village visible on the further ridge. The Wartnaby Fish Pool Valley and the Grimstone Valley merge at Saxelby.

We now traverse this view, going past Glebe Farm into Saxelby, which, except for a few heavily-thatched old cottages, is very similar to Wartnaby, and retracing our steps ascend the high ground along a parallel road which passes through Saxelby Wood and Marriott's Spinney.

Saxelby Wood mounts the hill, and stops short, like the sea on a beach, but throws out a spur to face Marriott's Spinney across the road. It is a wood of considerable size. Both spinney and wood consist mainly of ash and oak. The former has been partially cleared of ash, and the fresh growths spring from the stools amidst upstanding oaks.

It is interesting to note *en passant* that in the survey of Leicestershire made in the twelfth century the Earl of Leicester is credited with 5 carucates in Saxebia (Saxelby) and 6 carucates in Siwaldebia (Shoby), which represents the " Seoldesberie " of Domesday ; and which is entered as 11 carucates as part of the forfeited fief of Earl Aubrey of Northumbria. In a footnote to the twelfth-century survey, in the Victoria " History of the County of Leicester," it is stated that " The 11 carucates in question clearly represent the 6 carucates which the present survey assigns to Shoby, together with the 5 carucates with which the Earl of Leicester is credited above in the adjoining vill of Saxelby." The twelfth-century survey of Leicestershire was one of three similar records compiled during the second half of the reign of Henry I, but is only of recent discovery, being found in the Public Record Office by Mr. Round, who discusses its bearing on problems of assessment and the disposition of forfeited fiefs by Henry I in " Feudal England."

The carucate was a variable measure, denoting the amount of land which could be ploughed by one plough and team of oxen in one year, having meadow and pasture and houses for the householders and cattle belonging to it. It varied according to the nature of the soil and custom of husbandry in every country, and has been estimated at from sixty to one hundred and twenty acres.

Near to Saxelby Wood is Grimstone Gorse. These " gorse " coverts are usually such only in name—other growth having long supplanted the gorse. Grimstone Gorse is a well-hidden and secluded covert ; it lies on the Grimstone side of the railway line, and can only be seen by going to look for it. In days gone by it was one of the most famous coverts in existence. Now, since Saxelby Wood has grown to large dimensions, its sporting worth is largely lost, and its glamour dimmed.

Grimstone Gorse figures in many notable runs that took place in Frank Gillard's time, when the Belvoir had the right to draw this part of Quorn country. Among the best was the big day on January 16th, 1889, when a fox ran from Melton Spinney to the Gorse in fifty minutes at a great pace, and here, after hounds very nearly changed their fox, the hunted fox was viewed by a signalman on the railway, and was finally run to ground at Thrussington, after an hour and fifty minutes. On another occasion a fox ran through Grimstone Gorse and headed for "The Curate," but was killed by a passing train.

Grimstone village stands above the valley and the gorse in an exposed position; it is another typical village, with a square-towered church. Now the road falls towards Saxelby, but before reaching it we turn aside through the park on the way to Shoby Scholes.

The country is here on a larger scale, with wide views south and south-east. Looking east towards the station, across the smooth acres of the park, the hills beyond have a down-like appearance, their curved ridges leading back to Wartnaby, but southward, beyond Saxelby, the horizon is more spacious, the rich blues and greys of the landscape falling away into clear pearly distance towards Asfordby and the Wreake. It is one of those vignettes of pastoral scenery that constitute the charm of Leicestershire, a cleavage of the nearer hills disclosing range upon range of low wooded ridges—trees massed together into the semblance of hills on a miniature scale—leading to a vaster expanse of country where incident is lost, flecked here and there with white films of smoke from a passing train or tall factory chimney. And beyond again, where distance and low-gathered clouds are one, a delicate pencilling of far-off heights, almost invisible in the haze.

And then, as we turn west, lost in its hollow is Shoby, a stream running through its grass fields. The little hamlet of a few cottages and four farms once belonged to the Earls of Aylesford, to whose family it passed with the Manor of Saxelby about 1673. The Priory Farm stands, as its name suggests, on the site of the ancient priory. This isolated and charming spot is familiar to all followers of the Quorn.

Turning right-handed at Shoby and beginning the long ascent of one and a half miles to the Six Hills road, at three-quarters of a mile distance Shoby Scholes lies just on the left in the dip below the road. It is also collected secretively in its hollow, but at the south-west corner tall oaks have reared themselves where the covert climbs up the hillside, giving it a marked distinction of character.

While in the neighbourhood of Shoby, mention must be made of the Quorn's great run on December 23rd, 1889, which covered a large part of the country just described, and is one of the finest runs in the annals of Leicestershire.

The run is described at length in Mr. Otho Paget's " Memories of the Shires," from which quotation must be made, as he and Mr. " Robby " Muir were the only participators in the latter part of it. The Quorn hounds had met at Wymeswold. It was an exceptionally good scenting day, but beyond a very moderate run and a fox chopped in covert, the day had been wasted

SHOBY SCHOLES.

until Walton Thorns was drawn as a last chance before taking hounds home. In Mr. Paget's words :

" The day was far spent, there had been no run, and the shadow of despair was gradually settling down upon us. . . .

" There are anxious moments as we wait and listen for a sound that will raise us from the depths of despair to the heights of bliss. Nearly the whole covert has been drawn and we relapse into sorrow, when all of a sudden there is a shrill Tally-ho ! from Firr that fills our souls with joy. Someone views the varmint across the ride, and Fred's scream tells us he is away.

" The run commenced with a ring—thirty minutes at racing pace."

The fox ran up-wind and circled by Burton Spinneys and far out by Sea-

grave village, returning to Walton Thorns. Here several who had enjoyed this flying thirty minutes were under the impression that the run had ended. Mr. Paget continues :

" These men must, I think, have been left behind, for hounds were barely five minutes in the covert before they were sailing away again up the thorn-studded field beyond—it was a day when scent was better in the open. All Quornites know the line, in and out of the wide road that leads to Burton, and then a perfect hunting country that may land you anywhere. Half a mile short of Ella's Gorse the fox bore round to the right, and then going over Mr. Coupland's old farm crossed the top road near Shoby Lane Ends.

" I can distinctly remember passing a small square spinney that is on the edge of the Wolds tableland, and entering the valley that stretches away to Hoby Clump. Shoby Scholes we left wide on the left. It was somewhere about this time that I missed Firr and the rest of the field, and my only companion for the rest of the run was that good sportsman, Mr. ' Robby ' Muir —he had not at that time won his laurels and his military title in the Boer War.

" The pack never once slackened their pace, and I can see them now gliding up the steep rise towards Shoby village, whilst we toiled after them with the unpleasant feeling that we were losing distance. On the top of the hill we could afford to put on steam again, and then for a few minutes they were out of sight in crossing Shoby Lane, but we were able to get in touch with them beyond. My next recollection is a slight check near Mr. Wright's house, Saxelby Park, and then they were off again as hard as ever in the gathering gloom of the shortest day.

" Then it was the pack crossed the Midland Railway, and they were only just clear when the express from Nottingham flashed by. We had a choice of bridges to right or left, but either meant a detour of at least half a mile—the right meant going through Grimstone village, and we took the left. This naturally put us two fields behind, but we could still just manage to see hounds, though unable to make up the leeway lost.

" On arrival at Welby Osier Beds the pack were skimming up the hill beyond, and looked like dusky ghosts flitting on in the twilight.

" At the grass road above Welby village I made a fatal error, and, unfortunately, persuaded my companion to follow me. It was nearly dark, and hounds had again got ahead of us, so that it seemed best to try and cut them off at the Melton turnpike. This would have worked out satisfactorily if the fox

had not reached the end of his tether; but, as it was, hounds killed him on the ironstone tramway whilst we were ahead of them. Had we followed them down the little lane that leads by Welby church we should have seen the finish. Thus ended the best run I have ever seen, the best scent, and the stoutest fox.

"When Firr came up, Ruby, an old favourite, met him with the mask in her mouth."

LORD AYLESFORD'S COVERT.

As we stand under the hedgerow ash trees, Shoby Scholes appears as symmetrical a picture of a fox covert as man may see. It is girdled at the road end by elders, and flanked on its slope by oaks, overlooking a view, grey and mysterious, relieved only by the blue horizon. On the right of the road is Lord Aylesford's Covert.

The country now begins to take the definite character of the Wolds. A mile away south-west is Ragdale village, itself two miles north of Brooksby. We now reach the main road, turn to the left and run into the Fosse Way at The Durham Ox, the Inn at Six Hills. A long narrow spinney called the Oaks runs at a tangent from the cross-ways to Ragdale Wood, lying a quarter

of a mile away to the left. Ragdale Wood is one of the very few in this district that contains pines. Just beyond, on the roadside, is Charlton's Gorse.

At one and a half miles from the cross-ways a road turns off to the left to Thrussington. Instead of continuing down the Fosse Way to Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake and passing Cossington Gorse, we take this quiet rural lane. Ahead lies the far country across the Valley of the Wreake, and away on the left the country that has just been described. Close at hand is the peerless Hoby Vale, beyond the Ox Brook.

The rich upper portion of the Valley of the Wreake is known as the Hoby Vale. It is a valley of great fertility, and very strongly fenced. A fast thing here is stiff and exhilarating going. Brooksby is visible ahead, where the river, railway and road mark the boundary of the Monday country. The river valley, apart from the Osier Beds and Wade's and Bell-Ringers Spinneys, and the villages of Hoby and Thrussington—the latter once the location of the Quorn kennels for a short period—leaves little more to be described.

From the slopes of the Vale distant landmarks of the Friday Quorn are conspicuous far across the river. On the right is the Coplow, rearing its fine dome above the haze of the horizon. It has been compared to le Puy de Dome at a distance, or in homelier simile, The Wrekin. Nearer is the dark mass of Barkby Holt, and in the middle distance Queniborough's tall spire. After reaching the lower ground, Ashby Pastures and Cream Gorse crest the slope facing the Hoby Vale.

Briefly, the stretch of country passed under review is a parallelogram, tilted from north-east to south-west. The Abb-Kettleby and Melton road is its base, the Little Belvoir and Six Hills road its northern line; the Fosse Way from Six Hills to Ratcliffe is opposed to the base and the Valley of the Wreake is its southern line. The Welby, Wartnaby Fish Pool, Saxelby and Shoby Vales cross it roughly from north-west to south-east, and the Saxelby, Hoby and Ox Brooks in a similar direction. All these cross vales derive from the Valley of the Wreake. The whole area of the parallelogram rises from that valley to the high ground that overlooks the Belvoir Vale, on which, near Old Dalby, is the beginning of the true Wolds. As they reach the higher ground the vales gradually die out.

Before going on to the Wolds, the Belvoir Vale in Quorn country must be taken in its place in the order assigned to the three physical features of the Monday Quorn.

CHAPTER II

MONDAY COUNTRY (*continued*) : THE VALE

" I never saw fairer Meadows then there a bothe Ripes of Trent."—LELAND.

LOOKING from Broughton Hill across the Vale of Belvoir on a windy day, the spaciousness of the landscape is enhanced by wide vistas opening among the clouds. The low strata of cumulous formations lying above the western slopes that mark the limits of the Vale, where the ground rises rapidly to the Wolds, lead the eye from range upon range of silvered and exquisitely modelled forms to more distant and dimly-seen shapes above the flat country widening out towards the Fens. Where the cloud formations drift apart, the blue of deep and almost sombre tone is seamed across by long " mare's tails " or cirrus clouds, swirling, hair-like threads—ice particles floating through high altitudes—and these in their turn are hidden by great billows, cumuli passing overhead and darkening the landscape with their shade. It is a scene where the alternate lights and shadows of the sky move in counterpart across the land ; the Vale of Belvoir is swept by trailing shades, and these, mounting the slopes, give emphasis to the modelling of country, rendering its structure doubly clear.

Prominent in the landscape is Hickling Standard, a knob or rounded, semi-isolated spur, the last outpost of a hill country sinking to a vale. The Upper Broughton district directly overlooks that small part of the Vale which is Quorn territory, and which rises rapidly to meet the high ground to the north, west and south. Immediately below is the village of Nether Broughton, lying between Upper Broughton and Broughton Hill. The country has not the rich soil of the lowlands, but is noted for its dairying. Dairy herds are grazing in some of the fields, chiefly red Lincoln shorthorns. An extensive dairy farm lies beside the road leading to Old Dalby.

Sinking into the valley, three-quarters of a mile away, is Clawson Thorns, across the Belvoir boundary on the right. On clear days Belvoir Castle is visible from the hill. The boundary of this Leicestershire portion of the

WAITING FOR THE TERRIER ON BROUGHTON HILL

Belvoir Vale, which the Quorn hold, is the course of the Smite up to Sherbrooke's Covert ; the rest of the Vale for the Quorn is in South Notts, the river continuing as boundary up to Colston Basset.

The Smite has its sources in the high ground from Holwell Mouth to Old Dalby. Leland mentions it on his approach to Melton : " From *Langar* by veri fair Medows and Corne ground to Smithe, a Brooklet that ther devidith *Nottinghamshire* from *Leyrcestreshire* a iii Myles." The Smite forms the Quorn and Belvoir boundary from near Holwell Mouth to Colston Basset. It is a formidable and much-feared obstacle which has, as Mr. T. F. Dale says, " turned many a good horse and half drowned many a bold man." Besides the stream itself, smaller tributaries of it add to the water-jumping in this part of the Monday Quorn ; many of these, as previously mentioned, are negligible, but some are wide enough to cause considerable grief. Brooksby describes a run in which one of these tributaries was an obstacle, and his description is a good introduction to what may be expected when they bar the way :

" Watching the dark clouds driven across an angry sky before a cold southerly wind, and knowing the barometer to have sustained a heavy fall—it was difficult to imagine hounds running on Saturday last, January 26th. But I learn that there was a rattling good scent all day with the Belvoir, and that the Quorn had a good forty minutes. The former pack met at Hose, in the Vale of Belvoir : the latter at Lodge-on-the-Wolds, on the opposite hills towards Nottingham. Hose is nearer Melton ; so fashion went with the former—and the two packs, though avoiding an absolute clash, were together in Roehoe Wood in the course of the day. And what the Meltonians saw was as follows—Hose Gorse blank ; Sherbrooke's Gorse apparently so, even though its earth was duly visited and examined. A local authority, however, insisted that it was tenanted : a second visit was paid ; and the visitor, heaving a stone into the cavern, found a startling response in Reynard bolting right between his legs. No further time was lost in covert ; hounds leaving on the goodly terms which half ensure a run from the small gorses of the Midlands. Overlooking Hickling village, and towards Parson's Thorns, is the grass-clad hill of Hickling Standard. Up this and into the breeze, hounds drove merrily ; then bent to the right over the green enclosures behind Hickling and Kinoulton. With men and horses fairly warmed, a thoroughly pictorial Leicestershire scene was, I am told, enacted. A tributary of the Smite drains the Vale here ; and is neatly and deeply cut as it passes the villages named. Smooth turf leads downhill towards it and covers the bank beyond—the latter

rising almost a foot higher than the take-off, and half hidden moreover by the sheltering hedge. A dozen men came at it nearly abreast. Mr. Pennington on his brown Yorkshire mare hit off, perhaps, the broadest spot, and reached the other side with a fall. Mr. Barclay and his hog-maned chestnut took some time to assure themselves that they had really arrived thither in company. Mr. Lubbock, the Duke of Portland, Mr. Pryor and the first whip got over in safety; while, according as luck directed or horseflesh failed them, Mr. Beaumont, Count Kaunitz, Mr. G. Paget, Mr. A. Brocklehurst, and half a dozen others filled in the picture with success or disaster. . . . Turning now towards the upper ground, hounds left Kinoulton 'Gorse' a little to the right, and made up a capital twenty minutes into Roehoe Wood. Running the length of it, they pointed for Wynnstay Gorse; till a shepherd dog put a veto on their movements in that direction, and drove their fox back through covert. At this moment Firr's unmistakable voice rang up the wood; and the followers of the two packs found themselves commingling—Mr. Sherbrooke, indeed, leaving the Quorn (the nearer pack in the morning), went on with the Belvoir, to see their fox killed from his own covert. This was effected when—after slower hunting round The Parson's—the circle was all but completed, and their beaten fox got to ground in the bank of the Smite, at no great distance from Sherbrooke's Gorse. A full term of law was no use to his stiffened limbs; and when bolted he was speedily caught. Time to ground, one hour and three minutes."

A more formidable obstacle to hunting than the Smite, however, and one that runs fairly through the "Quorn" Belvoir Vale, is the Grantham Canal. It has been well said that in a low-lying hunting country railways are a blessing in disguise, as they stop the development of canals, a much more serious menace to the sporting qualities of the country. Bridges are plentiful across the canal; near Hose, at Hickling and Kinoulton, and in the neighbourhood of Owthorpe. The longest unbridged section is between Hickling and Kinoulton.

Returning to the slopes below Upper Broughton, Muxloe Hill is on the right, a twisting road running over it to Hickling. At one and a quarter miles from Upper Broughton a rough track leads off to the left through two fields to "The Curate." This famous covert lies close to the main Nottingham road, which foxes have to cross when making for the Vale. It is a low, closely-grown covert of gorse and blackthorn, with here and there a stunted ash and a few elders; there are some tall trees in the centre, beyond which it slopes steeply north-west towards the railway. A favourite line for a fox

to take from Curate's Gorse is across the main road past Hickling Standard and Parson's Thorns, and round by Hickling village, into the Vale. The main road is generally crowded with cars and second-horsemen, and on a recent occasion two foxes crossed one after the other at a few minutes interval, while hounds were drawing the covert; neither fox seemed to pay any attention to the cars and foot-people on the road. Hounds got on to the line of the second fox and a fine run followed, which was only ended by dusk close to the banks of the canal, when hounds were taken home. Foxes seem

GONE AWAY FROM "THE CURATE."

to pay very little attention to cars on a main road if they have decided to make a certain point; foot-people in the fields are far more likely to head them off. It is quite a common sight to see a fox pass in front of a car while motoring, when hounds are not in the vicinity at all, and it stands to reason that they would therefore hardly refrain from doing so when in danger of their lives.

Parson's Thorns lies north-east across the road, and before reaching it, it is worthy of note that Lincoln Cathedral is sometimes visible from this point.

"The Parson" is a little covert of scrub and elder and low trees and has no great value as a fox covert, but its appearance is remarkable. It comes surging over the dome of its hill, stopping abruptly a hundred yards short

of the road below, suggesting a wave that remains poised as though about to break. This road leads from the turnpike to Hickling village, leaving Hickling Pastures on the left and continuing below the northern slope of the Standard. Away to the north are flat fields spreading out in the direction of Kinoulton and the bank of the canal.

Hickling Standard, as seen from the road, looks like a spur of the South Downs transferred to the Midlands, one of those lower foothills so common in downlands, climbed by straggling hedges and dotted with trees. Here is a toiling, though brief, ascent for horses after the hounds have crossed the fields from Kinoulton in a fast burst. The scene on such occasions is reminiscent of old sporting prints : away go the hounds, up the green slope of the hill, their tan and white streaking the grass like the passing of a meteor, a simile that may appeal forcibly to those whose horses are blown before the ascent ; and away over the Kinoulton flats comes the field. The fences here can be jumped anywhere and twenty horsemen may be seen taking them abreast. They ride at the quick-thorn hedges " all out," in the manner which delighted Nimrod. Down comes a chestnut horse, its rider brought to earth in the manner of Alken's pictures, a momentary blur of scarlet on the green, but the rest approach the road, cross it with a clatter of hoofs, and tail out up the rising ground. Along the skyline of the Standard hounds can be seen turning right-handed towards " The Curate," and the top of the hill once gained, the Vale is left behind. But hounds may turn for Hickling village, descending the steep extremity of the spur. Some of the fences here are stiff and there is a bunching together of riders where the straggling bull-finches can be broken through. A few minutes more and the main street of Hickling is crowded with the hunt ; hounds pass through and check, at fault by the banks of the canal.

The houses and walls of Hickling, in South Notts, are built of red brick, old and weather-stained, the roofs of the houses being of red tiles. Amongst them is set the old stone church with its square tower. Hickling Glebe owns half " The Curate " and Mr. C. J. Phillips the other half ; it also owns " The Parson." With the exception mentioned, the Quorn rent both coverts from the Glebe.

Twilight often finds the streets of Hickling filled with horses and hounds —the Belvoir or the Quorn—for the village is the scene of the end of many a run across the Vale. Here returning riders take the main road past the Broughtons for Melton or turn to the left in the village, going by Long Clawson and Scalford Hall, through Belvoir country, to the same destination. More

muddy coats and broken hats can be seen at the end of the day in Hickling than in almost any other village around, for a run in this part of the Vale means a great deal of jumping over some very strong fences, and even those which can be taken anywhere account for a good deal of grief. In fact it is a truth about hunting that a line of country which looks easy will often empty more saddles than one which is exceptionally stiff. All riders know that a horse seldom falls over a really big fence, if it is jumpable; the small ones more often spell disaster.

THE END OF THE DAY IN HICKLING.

One mile east of Hickling is the Smite, running deep-set and narrow, guarded on one side by a stiff hedge. Three-quarters of a mile further on is Sherbrooke's Covert, in Belvoir country.

After leaving Hickling, the Kinoulton road crosses the Grantham Canal. At this point the canal forms a harbour and holds a wharf; on a winter's day when ruffled by a north-east wind its waters look dark and cold. In summer the shadowy forms of fish can be seen floating in its cool depths and azure dragonflies dart over its rippled surface. It is a haven of refuge

from the heat. Men and boys fish in the pool below the bridge, watching idle floats bobbing on the water, a pleasant excuse for their own idleness. The Vale can be hot when the earth is baked hard after weeks without rain.

Approaching Kinoulton, Colston Basset flings up its tall spire on the right, and on the left are the trees of Kinoulton Spinney, with the Wolds rising just beyond. Hounds will often run from here to Kaye Wood in the Belvoir country or to Owthorpe Borders.

THE CANAL BRIDGE.

The canal is crossed again on the way to Owthorpe, and there is another bridge in Kinoulton village, lying to the left. A group of four black poplars towers above the canal at this spot, their graceful stems rising to a great height. In summer there is little sound but the eternal rustling of their leaves, their long spars and continued movement suggesting a full-rigged ship under sail. Not far away is another group of trees, elms of great age, attested by trunks deeply seamed with wrinkles and covered with bosses and distortions of growth. Their leaves cast dark pools of shadow round them on the fields.

In the Vale between Kinoulton and Owthorpe are trappy little ditches and hedges, fields of corn or roots, and rough tracks amongst the meadows

Following one of these tracks for half a mile, on the left is Owthorpe village and Owthorpe Borders. The wood climbs out of the Vale on to the Wolds, where it runs for nearly a mile beside the Fosse Way. Owthorpe itself is on the western boundary of the Vale.

As at Hickling, most of the houses are built of red brick, or a hard bluish-white marlstone, which weathers by destruction of its laminated strata over long years; many are built of both, and nearly all are red-tiled. On the eastward side is the church. Owthorpe Church is a sort of shapeless fragment, within and without. There has been a church there from time immemorial, but when the old building was taken down in the middle of the eighteenth century, the material was used over again to form a small church, and ancient windows were thrust into Georgian walls, resulting in the curious edifice which stands to-day. Yet it is not altogether unpleasing.

The graveyard is deep in uncut grass, and the graves are lost in the wilderness, except where a scythe has been at work; these old slate tombstones—some flat, some crooked, few straight—give dates from 1700 and on to 1832. Many are just timeless mounds merging with the earth. On the east and south sides an old wall of marlstone surrounds the graveyard. Age is stamped on everything in this secluded spot, yet in reality the earliest dates on the tombstones carry back little further than the first records of hunting in the district. The last date, 1832, is two years after Lord Southampton had the Quorn kennels removed from Quorndon to Leicester. What an immense period of time separates these apparently ancient tombs from the highway of the Fosse, a mile from the village, beyond the dark crest of Owthorpe Borders.

To climb Owthorpe Hill and pass the north corner of the wood is to pass from the rural character of the Vale to a wilder district; the pines and larches of the wood looking across open, rolling country. At the cross-roads, which mark here the South Notts boundary, is a small spinney south of Owthorpe Borders which was cut down when large areas were felled during the War, but has been replanted again. From Owthorpe Hill a prominent feature in the landscape is Cotgrave Gorse, in the South Notts.

Quorn Country now turns aside to the Wolds, leaving its small area of the low ground; the great Vale of Belvoir stretching away beyond Colston Basset and the Smite to its eastern boundary in the Fens.

It is a beautiful country and none can leave it without regret. Often in a winter twilight, when the summit of Broughton Hill is reached, the panorama of the Vale has the appearance of an immense natural harbour running up

like a sandy cove beneath the cliffs of the Wolds, and beyond, receding into illimitable distance, blue and dark like the sea. The illusion is heightened when lights shine from the hamlets, few and far between, as from ships at anchor in the bay. And if the scene be viewed upon a Sunday evening, distant chimes from the old churches sound faintly through an atmosphere that is somewhat thin and rarefied, as if it had been scoured by bleak winds from the Fens and the real, not very distant sea. The chimes of bells have a quavering note as if some of them came from far off, echoing from county to county—the bells of St. Luke's calling to the bells of St. Margaret's, and the bells of St. John's to the bells of St. Mary's. And as a background to all these, heard in imagination rather than in actuality, there is a deep-toned echo from the chimes of Nottingham.

CHAPTER III

MONDAY COUNTRY (*continued*): THE WOLDS

" These Melton Gentlemen are wonderfully afraid of a little dirt."—SIR RICHARD SUTTON.

THE question of what is or is not " Wolds " in Leicestershire, is one which finds maps, guide-books, and local residents at variance; but if an attempt is made to define their extent, perhaps the last are the best authorities.

Discuss the matter with any farmer of long residence in the country—many of them have an almost inexhaustible fund of local knowledge—and the following will probably be the definition arrived at: that the Little Belvoir-Six Hills road and the Six Hills-Ratcliffe road are the south-eastern boundaries of the Wolds in Leicestershire *as commonly understood*, although wold-like country persists as far as Ragdale and elsewhere just across the Six Hills road, and on the Ordnance Map the word " Wolds " does occasionally occur. An exception might be made for the inclusion of the Thrussington Wolds, containing Ragdale, about the designation of which there was a controversy, referred to later; but, if only on this account, the boundary formed by the two roads is the simplest.

In a north-eastern direction the Wolds extend for sixteen miles as far as Belvoir on the Lincolnshire border, forming an escarpment which half encircles the Vale, its greatest height being above Old Dalby, four hundred feet, and at Broughton Hill, where it rises to five hundred. Further north, across the South Notts border, the Wolds form a spur which approaches to within six miles of Nottingham and the banks of the Trent. On the west they are bounded by the Valley of the Soar.

A considerable part of the Quorn Monday country is in the South Notts Wolds.

North of Six Hills, round Widmerpool, this country is associated for followers of the Quorn with rain and mud; with the former because, owing to its wind-swept spaces and exposed uplands, bad weather occasions more

discomfort than elsewhere—and, as previously mentioned, storms seem to reserve themselves specially for Monday fixtures in this district; with the latter because there is more plough and heavy going in this part of the Monday country than in the area already described. In many places the enclosures are small and strongly fenced, the lanes narrow and boggy, and the grassland frequently broken by ploughed fields, where the soil is sticky and the furrows water-logged. Round Normanton and Plumtree one is already aware of the proximity of Nottingham, little more than five miles away, and the country has almost a suburban character. Further south, towards Willoughby and Six Hills, there are large grass enclosures and typical Wold scenery; but in Sir Richard Sutton's days many of the *élite* from Melton would turn home if hounds were taken north of Six Hills, which occasioned the remark that precedes this chapter.

After leaving the confines of the Vale at Owthorpe, the first covert is Wynnstay Wood, beyond the Fosse Way opposite Owthorpe Lodge, a well-known covert that often holds a fox; while three-quarters of a mile on the other side of the road is the Devil's Elbow, a small spinney on the banks of the Grantham Canal at the foot of the Wolds upland.

Lodge-on-the-Wolds is a parish of one house—a small farm-house—and hounds meet for this fixture at Owthorpe Lodge on the Fosse Way. Close to the road is Kinoulton Gorse, now known as Kinoulton Wood.

We are here on the Kinoulton Wolds, approaching the cross-roads at Widmerpool New Inn, leaving Rowhoe Wood on the right. North of the wood is Rowhoe Thorns, a rough, thorn-covered field that has acquired this name.

A little to the north-east is one of the highest points in the district, the site of the old graveyard belonging to Kinoulton, which was abandoned when the church which stood there was dismantled and a new one erected in the village. It is a bleak, deserted spot, flanked by a low hedge, and containing a mound where ripening grass, yellow rattle and ox-eye daisies encircle a solitary ash sapling—anyone who knows it is reminded of the curious inscription written on the score of one of Beethoven's quartettes, "A weeping willow or acacia tree over the grave of my brother," and the music thereby suggested has an affinity with the sighing of the wind through the dry grass. In this wild garden are a number of tombstones dating from 1746 to 1857, some leaning, and others fallen among the tangle of flowers and weeds.

From the hillock can be seen Kinoulton and the Vale, the spire of Colston Basset, the silver thread of the canal, and the far-off country stretching away

to the Fens. It is a final view before turning away to the bleaker spaces of the Wolds, where wide prospects are often hidden by a rise of ground, one low ridge succeeding another. Down the steep slope hounds have often passed in full cry, leaving the high country for the flat meadows by the canal.

Widmerpool New Inn is new only in name—for although the present building is of comparatively recent date, an old woman named Harriet Tinkler, who died at the age of ninety-five a few years ago, danced at the " wakes " held at the New Inn when she was a girl, and could just remember the inn being opened. There was probably an older posting house on the same site. The Mr. Robertson who preceded the late Major Robertson at Widmerpool Hall, farmed the estate from Nottingham, and used to take out a *2s. 6d.* licence each year for the inn, though he never used it. He died in 1863, and even the licence lapsed after that date.

Widmerpool Hall was rebuilt in 1872 by Major Robertson. The stables now occupy the site of the old Hall. The new building was constructed of bath stone, hauled from Nottingham station by cart before the days of the Melton Mowbray railway. Fairham Covert was planted by Major Robertson, on the banks of the Fairham Brook, which runs through the park and ultimately into the Trent.

Between the New Inn and Widmerpool village is Flint Hill Spinney.

Some years ago—relates Mr. Sherwin, who was fifty-five years in Major Robertson's service and witnessed the following incident—the Belvoir (then hunted by Frank Gillard) had run their fox into this covert, when the Quorn arrived to draw it, Mr. Coupland being Master. Coupland, who, like many famous Masters of Hounds, was sometimes more direct than polite, told Gillard with some force to take his hounds out. Gillard replied that he would be damned if he would; having run his fox in, he intended to have him out, dead or alive. At this rather heated moment, one of the field said: " Join in, Coupland." He did so, and the two packs ran hard—both Firr and Gillard hunting them—past Welby Osiers, and killed close to Asfordby, where the furnaces now stand. At the end of the run there seemed some doubt as to how hounds were to be separated, but Firr had no hesitation; he and Gillard went to opposite sides of the field and called their hounds off. In Major Robertson's words: " they went like children."

Leaving Widmerpool with the Hall set in its fine park, and the road to Keyworth running north between the woods—a dark, shaded road where wood pigeons cross from tree to tree—the road southward leads to Willoughby-on-the-Wolds. The distance is two miles, and on the way Green Hill can be

seen to the left. Before reaching the village, after passing Willoughby Lodge, standing close by the road, the grass slopes mark a site of historic interest—here was fought one of the minor actions of the Civil War.

The Battle of Willoughby Field is not mentioned in the histories of Clarendon or Gardiner, but although it was a comparatively trivial affair—some thousand men being engaged on either side—it was the first signal victory for raw Parliamentary levies in the Second Civil War in the summer of 1648, and had an important bearing on the fall of Colchester. From letters found on

ONCE A BEAN-FIELD: THE SCENE OF THE BATTLE.

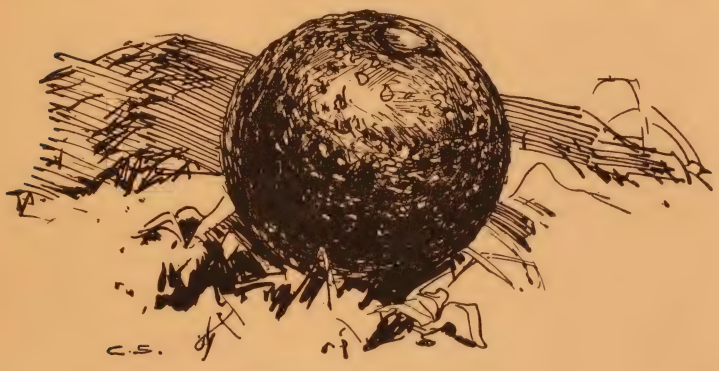
captured officers it was evidently the intention of the Royalists to march southward, augmenting their forces on the way, and raise the siege of that town. The victory also prevented the advance of Holland and Buckingham through Northampton before the St. Neots fight on July 10th.

The best account of the engagement and the events preceding it is contained in an essay by Mr. E. W. Hensman, M.A., published in the "Transactions of the Royal Historical Society," 1923. The battle followed the sacking of Lincoln by the Cavaliers on June 30th, and their subsequent march towards Nottingham. On the night of July 4th the Royalist troops bivouacked in the neighbourhood of Widmerpool; and early on the morning of the 5th Rossiter, commanding what forces he had been able to raise in face of the

unexpected Royalist descent from the north, ordered one hundred and fifty of his ablest horsemen, under the command of Captain Champion of Nottingham, to press forward and engage the enemy's rearguard, thus allowing time for the main body of his troops to come into action.

Over the Wolds came Champion's small body of cavalry, having ridden hard through the early hours of the morning, taking the Royalists by surprise. In Mr. Hensman's words :

" After some preliminary rearguard skirmishing, the Royalists drew up all their men in a single line in a large bean field on the north side of Willoughby



A CANNON BALL FOUND IN THE BROOK.

and about a quarter of a mile from the church. Rossiter, on the other hand, having been informed by Champion of the enemy's position, set off ' at full trot,' and ' observing that the enemies' strength was placed in their body, consisting of a party of foot winged with horse, and those horse flanked with Musketeers, and that with them the men of the best quality (as appeared by their outward Garbes) seemed to be mounted ' ; he decided to attack them, although he himself had neither foot nor dragoons. He drew up his front line in three divisions, with himself in the centre, Colonel White of Nottingham on the right wing, and Hacker on the left ; and he placed two reserves of horse in the rear. Within half an hour his preparations were complete, the password ' Fairfax ' was passed along the ranks, and he advanced to the charge. The

enemy received the onset with great resolution, shouting their battle-cry of ' Jesus,' and it was ' handsomely disputed on both sides.' "

According to the official account of the fight, Rossiter's reserves, unable to restrain themselves, charged with the rest, and both armies met at the sword's point. The fighting continued so fiercely that the entire forces engaged were thrown into a state of disorder. The Cavaliers were eventually overcome, many prisoners being taken. Those who escaped numbered little more than twenty, though a number of wounded fell in the cornfields round Willoughby, and their bodies were not recovered before the lists of casualties in the battle were published. Thirty Roundheads fell on the field, Rossiter himself being hit by a musket ball, but not disabled. Mr. Hensman continues : " Michael Stanhope, a gallant youth of twenty-four years, and one of the triumvirate of Royalist commanders, was slain on the field of battle. Natives of Willoughby still point to the spot where he fell, and a silvered shoe-buckle of the Stuart period, which was found close by and may possibly have been his, is a treasured possession of successive vicars of the parish."

How many times have scarlet-coated riders swept over the turf which once thundered beneath the hoofs of Rossiter's advancing cavalry, when the sun rising behind the quiet hamlet lit up the Roundhead " colours " and glittered along a *chevaux de frise* of drawn swords ! Over the cornfields they charged, and in the turmoil of the fight the rival forces swung first one way and then another. Wounded troopers crawled down to the stream below the village, riderless horses, their saddles blood-stained and heavy stirrup-irons beating their flanks, galloped up the village street or wandered among the fields where the famous Gorse now stands. Many brave men of Willoughby lay upon that earth, where their horses rolled upon the broken bean-stalks or corn—earth cut and scarred and pounded to mud by charge and counter-charge, until a final rally decided the issue of the day.

A graphic sidelight is thrown upon the battle by the following entry in the old records of the County of Nottingham made during the seventeenth century : " On 20th July, 1657, Forty shillings yearly was allowed to Richard Cooper he having been a soldier in Ye Parliaments service under ye command of ye late Colonel ffrancis Thornhagh deceased and received diverse wounds on his body at Willoughby feight where he lay under ye Chirurgeons hands for ye space of nyne monothes and is disabled to earne his own maintence as appeares by a certificate under the hands as well of Richard Dolphin his Captain as alsoe of Colonell Charles White and Major Chadwick who were eye witnesses of his wounds."

According to another entry, it is evident that the burden of pensioning maimed soldiers had become a heavy one : " Ye County Stocke was soe small and ye Pencons soe many."

Richard Cooper had evidently been enrolled in the Nottingham Horse under Colonel Francis Thornhaugh, one of Cromwell's best officers, of which a small detachment had been left behind while the regiment was fighting the Royalists in Wales. Colonel Thornhaugh was killed in pursuit of the Scots at Preston later in the same year.

To-day Willoughby looks the last place to be associated with a battlefield, with its quiet houses clustered above the stream which crosses the road beneath a stone bridge at the foot of the hill, a gentle slope leading down to the Gorse.

The old Manor-House lies towards the western end of this typical Wold village, and was once the home of the Willoughbys. In the fine old church are their stone effigies, some the figures of crusaders and one a judge. When the estate was sold, the old house was greatly mutilated. The original roof was removed, two gables and a string-course and pinnacles were destroyed, and the ancient oak beams taken away. The walls, reduced in height, were capped by a modern slate roof—replacing the old Swithland slates ; only one gable-end, shorn of much of its beauty, was left. The north side of the house is now a farm, the south consists of three cottages under one roof. Before the war Stilton cheeses were made at Willoughby, which is a village of dairy farmers.

Willoughby Gorse is just west of the village. Except for a few tall trees at the south end, it is a covert of close scrub growth, like many others in the vicinity. It lies remote and quiet on the banks of the stream, which eventually runs into the Soar, and on which, nearer its source, lie also Ella's Gorse and Mundy's Gorse. Thorpe Spinneys are further to the north, close by the Wysall road.

West of Willoughby, another road, like so many in the district bordered by broad tracts of rough grass, brambles and sedge, leads to Wymeswold. This is a high country with few coverts, except the Burton Spinneys, but Wymeswold itself is on the descent to a richer land with park-like scenery and fine trees. South-west of the village are Prestwold and Hoton, on the outside of the Monday country, and just within its boundary, Burton-on-the-Wolds.

Here the ground slopes rapidly westward to the Valley of the Soar, to the lowlands and water-meadows, the tributary streams and their bridges round the town of Loughborough. In the words of Leland : " The great stream of Sore River lay as I stoode on the left Hand of the Towne within lesse than

a Quarter of a Mile of it, and thereabout went *Lughborow* Water into Sore."

Though in some places the descents are fairly steep, the table-land of the Wolds slopes more gradually down to the Soar than it does from the escarpment above the Belvoir Vale, and much of the lower slopes being wooded the valley is hidden by trees ; moreover, the mountainous appearance of Charnwood Forest, now plainly visible, dwarfs the high ground in its vicinity.

Burton-on-the-Wolds is a quiet little village and township of two thousand three hundred acres, extending as far as Six Hills. The Hall was once owned

WILLOUGHBY GORSE.

by C. G. Mundy, Esq., who gave his name to Mundy's Gorse, but is now a seat of the Earl of Huntingdon. A peculiarity of the village is that it has no church, the inhabitants using the church at Prestwold.

East of Burton, a straight road crosses the Burton Wolds to Six Hills. The Spinneys lie to the south of this road (they were once the property of the Duke of Somerset, but are now owned by local farmers) ; to the north, towards Willoughby, is a fine grass country with stiff fences, the scene of some of the most famous runs in the district. The country viewed from the road is gently undulating, varying in height from three hundred to three hundred and fifty feet, and divided by large fields, nearly all grass. On the left can be seen the houses above Wymeswold, the village lying on slightly lower ground, and to

H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES ON "THE GIFT"

the right, beyond Wymeswold Lodge, is the stream previously mentioned and Ella's Gorse, with Mundy's Gorse further to the right, by Six Hills.

We must now return to Willoughby and follow the stream to its source, incidentally following also that narrow strip of South Notts which here runs sharply into Leicestershire.

It is said that if a horse stabled in the yard of the inn at Six Hills looks out of the stable door, its body is in Leicestershire and its head in Notts. Nobody has been found who wished to dispute this statement in recent years, but some old maps ignore the sudden incursion of one county into another. A good example is the map specially engraved for Curtis's " Topographical History of Leicestershire," published in 1831. Here the county boundary is shown as running a mile south of Willoughby, with little divergence one way or another. The veracity of this map is, however, rather doubtful; for, among other curious elaborations, a carefully " hazed " conical hill is placed at the Six Hills cross-roads, entitled " Sex or Seg's Hill." No other rise of ground is marked in the whole county except the heights of Charnwood Forest, many of which are indicated with slightly smaller " hazed " elevations! Such pimples as Billesdon Coplow, Burrough Hill and the Broughton escarpment are completely ignored. Whatever the map-maker did not know about Leicestershire, he was certain of one thing—that the Charnwood rocks and Seg's Hill were its principal, its only mountains, to each of which he gave a neat circular summit and surrounding slopes, the finished result suggesting a group of limpets or sea urchins with the hill in question their most solitary and dignified member. Those who do not know the place may read of its appearance in the next chapter—here we are concerned with it mainly for the part it plays, in the apt words of Brooksby, as " The Croydon Junction " of Quorn country, and we are already late in getting back to Willoughby.

Ella's Gorse is a mile from the village, and is approached by descending a grass-covered hill, suddenly revealing itself across the stream on the opposite slope—one of the most famous coverts in the Monday country. A tangle of whitethorn, blackthorn, privet and straggling furze, it lies partially masked by the brook-side trees. A stout fox, which eluded hounds for two seasons some years ago, used regularly to make its escape over the stream and by way of Willoughby and Old Dalby, or, as an alternative route, by way of Six Hills and the Thrussington Wolds, eventually reach Shoby Scholes, thus providing a run of more than forty minutes over a fine galloping and jumping country. Such old stagers become well known and are readily recognised. In Captain Forester's Mastership, a light grey fox used to frequent Wynnstay Gorse, and

its progeny, all foxes of a pale yellow colour, became established in the district. Similarly, Mr. Alan Pennington used to identify a fox often put up out of Cream Gorse, known as the " Hoton Fox " : " There goes the Hoton Fox," he would call out. But of all stories of the kind, the most remarkable concerns a keeper at Ragdale called Savage who had made a pet of a fox which was perfectly tame with him. Savage used to put this animal up before hounds reached covert in order to give it a good chance. On one occasion hounds got away after it and ran to Belvoir Castle, although they probably changed foxes before

ELLA'S GORSE : SUNSET.

arriving there. It is said to be a fact, vouched for by Messrs. Hallam and Collington, who farmed in the vicinity, that Savage used to rub this fox down when it eventually found its way back to Ragdale Wood after a long run !

But to return to Ella's Gorse—called after a farmer and horse-breeder named Ella, who died some fifty years ago—there is another fox story about this covert. At a much later date there was a keeper living near by, Tom Henderson, who had several sons, the youngest of whom was named after him. This lad was familiar with the foxes in the neighbourhood, and when watching the hunt would sometimes call out, " There goes a strange fox into my covert." The Gorse was known among the country people for many years by the name of " Little Tom."

The next covert on the banks of the stream, Mundy's Gorse, is mentioned by Nimrod as among the eight most famous in Quorn country. Nimrod had a special regard for the man who made it, after whom it was named, and whom he describes as "a real well-wisher to fox-hunting." He continues: "Mr. Munday*—to his honour be it told, as he never hunts—made a covert of twelve acres at his own expense in the Seg's Hill country, which always holds foxes." The Gorse lies one field away from the road, spread over the slopes of a low hill above the stream, encircled by broad rides. In summer when the young shoots are out it is like a grey pile carpet spread over the fields. Several years ago it was burnt down, the fire being visible at a great distance; and during the war it deteriorated, but has since been put in thorough order by Major Burnaby, one of the joint Masters of the Quorn.

We are now once more near Six Hills and the group of coverts close by the cross-roads, some of which have been referred to in an earlier chapter, belonging more particularly to the section of the Monday country first described. One of these, Ragdale Wood, was the occasion of a controversy of some heat regarding its name. It was popularly known as Thrussington Wolds, but Mr. Otho Paget, in his articles for *The Field*, adopted, with the authority of older references to it, its present name of Ragdale Wood. Thrussington Wolds more truly designate the surrounding country—but even here the name of Ragdale Wolds is now used on the Ordnance Map. On the other side of the road mentioned as the popular boundary of the true Wolds are Cradock's Ashes and Walton Thorns. The Ashes are a low plantation close to the Barrow and Seagrave roads; Walton Thorns, half a mile further, lies in a valley through which flows the Walton Brook.

After entering this covert by the bridle-gate at its northern end, and passing down the ride through its thorny wilderness to the bed of the stream, the stony road and bleak country left behind change to a sheltered vale, with a sweep of upland pasture meeting the view beyond the belt of trees that mark the southern boundary of the Thorns. When a fox steals out at the lower end, and hounds breast the hill, there is promise of a fine gallop back to Willoughby over the Burton Wolds.

During a run from Walton Thorns on December 31st, 1897, the great Tom Firr met with a fall which unfortunately contributed to his retirement, following another fall while cub-hunting in October, 1898. An account of the day's runs and Firr's accident is contained in the following extract from the diary of Mr. Fred Earp, first whip to the Quorn at the time, which he has

* Nimrod's spelling.

kindly sent in a letter. Mr. Earp says : " The Quorn hounds met at Hoby on December 31st, and drawing Shoby Scholes and Lord Aylesford's covert blank, went on to Ella's Gorse. They found and got away at once on the lower side, ran sharp to the far side of Willoughby, where the fox, being headed on the road, turned away to the right. The line passed by Old Dalby, and still bearing to the right, crossed the Fosse at Six Hills and went on through Mundy's Gorse, by Wymeswold, to Hoton New Covert, where hounds ran into their fox after a very good fifty-five minutes' hunt. We next drew Prestwold Coverts and Burton Spinneys blank, but found a brace of foxes at Walton Thorns. Hounds chopped one in covert, and got away with the other by the Ash Spinney, bearing left-handed over the Six Hills and Burton road to near Wymeswold. The fox, swinging right-handed, crossed the Wymeswold lane, when Firr had a bad fall in jumping a fence—his horse landing on the side of a small pit in a corner—and in my opinion struck his head on a small stump used to fasten a gate back. This was very unfortunate, as our fox got to ground in a drain at the bottom of a field close by Mill's farm. Firr got on his horse, ' Golden Shower,' but was quite dazed. Lord Lonsdale sent him home in a carriage, and we did not draw again."

Many stories of Tom Firr centre round Walton Thorns, one concerning his practice—the license of genius—of occasionally taking a line of his own across country with hounds, and ending with a kill in Walton Brook. About seven years before Firr's death, when Captain Warner and Mr. Paget were joint Masters of the Quorn, a member of the Hunt was coming away from Windmill Hill Covert, scent having been poor, when Firr caught him up with hounds. " Come on with me to Willoughby Gorse," he said, and off they went across country. Firr told his companion to get on the far side of the covert while he put in the hounds, and a fox soon stole away. Hounds ran fast and killed in the water as their fox was endeavouring to cross the stream.

The same Wold stream, the Walton Brook, has been described by Mr. Coupland as " forty feet of solid air." Small as some of these Wold streams are, they are awkward places to jump. That by Ella's Gorse was more often negotiated in the past than now, when there is the bridge for those who dislike its appearance. Otho Paget tells how Captain Elmhirst (Brooksby) once came to grief there :

" Foxes were rather hard to find, but we eventually found one at Ella's Gorse, and he gave us a first-rate gallop. In those days there was no bridge over the stream that flows below the covert, and getting over was not an easy

THE END OF A LONG RUN NEAR MUNDY'S GORSE

matter. There was one place close to the covert where fence and brook could be jumped together, but it wanted a fairly bold horse to face it. On this occasion the only man who rode at it was Capt. Elmhirst, with his arm in a sling, but he either had not enough steam on or his horse funked it, and dropping its hind legs, fell back into the water."

The area of the Wolds surrounding Walton Thorns, including the wold-like country about Ragdale, is, except for heavy going in places north of Six Hills, almost equal to the famous Friday country. As a proof of its quality may be cited the constant references to great runs which either commenced or ended near the Thorns scattered throughout hunting literature. In a previous chapter quotation was made from Mr. Paget's account of a run which started here, the best in his experience. In the opinion of many writers the foxes found north of the Wreake are stouter than those south of it, and the distances they have covered constitute some of the record runs in Leicestershire. From Walton Thorns a good line of country is assured in any direction; whether north to Ella's Gorse, east to Shoby Scholes, south across Hoby Vale and round by Cossington and Seagrave, or west as far as Hoton. Every acre has been ridden over time and again, every brook and landmark has its store of reminiscence, from the time of Nimrod up to the present day. It is hard in a brief space to do justice to such a country; there is something about the Wolds which makes it difficult to leave them, if only when writing of them, but as this chapter is getting lengthy, and there are other aspects of the district to be dealt with in the next, a halt must soon be made.

Just north of Seagrave are Pawdy Cross-roads and the kennels. Hounds often used to meet here during Lord Lonsdale's Mastership, before the new kennels were built. At that time the kennels were at Quorn.

The road to the right drops steeply to the Fish Pool Brook, and then, ascending the opposite slope, a sharp turn to the left leads to a steep descent to the right into the beautiful village of Walton-on-the-Wolds.

The village is set steeply among the folds of the hills, its houses climbing their slopes and tucking themselves away in corners. On the road that enters Walton from the east are several fine old brick farm-houses, dating back two hundred years, roofed with Leicestershire slates on which grows a yellow lichen. The houses are very tall, their two lower stories having large white-framed windows. Standing on the slopes of the Wolds, they tower above the road. Adjoining them are fine barns on the same plan, surrounded by solid brick walls; some have kitchen gardens in front, also walled, abutting on the roadside turf. The buildings throughout are of a fine-toned brick, well

designed for the purpose for which they were intended, with just that touch of art in their finish that makes them a delight to the eye.

Turning back to the cross-roads and passing through Seagrave, Cossington Gorse stands by the Fosse Way. To the south is Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake, and westward Sileby and Cossington, close to the junction of the Wreake with the Soar, the loop thus formed marking the south-western boundary of the Monday country.

SIX HILLS

CHAPTER IV

A LANDSCAPE IN THE WOLDS

"What thoughts at heart have you or I
We cannot stop to tell;
But dead or living, drunk or dry,
Soldier, I wish you well."—A. E. HOUSMAN.

AT Thurmaston, on the road from Leicester to Melton Mowbray, a Roman milestone was found in 1771, having an inscription which commemorated the progress of the Emperor Hadrian through Britain in the fourth year of his reign and the third of his Consulate, A.D. 120–1. The milestone gave the distance from the Roman town of Ratae, and finally settled the identity of that town with the City of Leicester.

When it first attracted attention, the stone had been removed from a square base near the spot where it was discovered, and had been used for many years as a sort of mounting block; it was, moreover, claimed by the parish authorities for mending the roads. But when its great historic interest was realised, it was at first set up in Belgrave Gate, Leicester; and later found a permanent home in the Leicester Museum. The stone is generally considered to be the earliest and most perfect inscribed milliary found in Britain.

The Melton road follows the Old Fosse Way as far as Thurmaston, where it turns to the right, the Fosse Way continuing straight to Six Hills, on the border of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, and crossing the Wolds on its course to Lincoln.

A Roman road-book, the "Itinerarium Antonini," supposed to have been written about A.D. 320, gives the distances and "stations" along the various routes of the empire, and Six Hills was formerly identified with Vernometum, but later research has placed the Roman station near Willoughby, a few miles away in the adjoining county. About a mile north of Six Hills the original pavement of the Fosse has been found: "Red flints laid with the smoothest side upwards on a bed of gravel" (Codrington, "Roman Roads in Britain"); and another milestone was also discovered, but only three letters of the inscription were decipherable.

The hamlet of Six Hills, or to give it its original name, Seg's Hill, consists of little more than an inn, but it is the junction of five existing roads, and is therefore well known to motorists, besides being one of the few places where petrol can be obtained in a rather lonely stretch of country.

Traces have been found of another road, possibly Roman, crossing the Fosse from Ermine Street in Rutland, known as the Salt Way. It is considered by many authorities to have been an ancient British route leading from

THE SALT WAY.

the Lincolnshire coast to the salt-mines at Droitwich, hence the name, and it may have been used later and relaid by the Romans. This road is supposed to have entered Leicestershire at Croxton Kerrial, and to have followed the present road by Little Belvoir to Six Hills, whence it continues through Barrow, but it has not been traced beyond the Soar further than Beacon Hill in Charnwood Forest. The Salt Way is not marked as such on any map, and the road to Barrow is not popularly associated with this old highway, which has elsewhere been completely lost.

The landscape round Six Hills is typical of the Wolds, but has an atmosphere

peculiarly its own. There is a sense of remoteness about its wide horizons, as though the land still lived in its historic past, which yet seems recent compared to the age before history. It was a land of forest, wild and featureless, across which the Romans laid the pavement of their military way, following perhaps some older track, as it was often their wont to do ; for all the Roman roads are not, according to popular conception, of mathematical straightness, but deviate slightly, as though they followed some primitive route already in use. Across the Wolds there may have been such a track, though the district was practically uninhabited in Roman times, and for many centuries after their period of occupation came to an end. This high ground above the Valley of the Soar, with the rocks of Charnwood rising on the west and immense tracts of forest stretching northward, must have appeared an inhospitable and gloomy wilderness to the road-makers—a veritable No-man's-land.

Here, as the work of laying the flint pavement of the Fosse went slowly on, and the ring of labour echoed over the dark uplands, the soldiers looking across the river valley would have seen the landscape grim and menacing—even to-day, shorn of their forests, the Wolds have a solemn spaciousness and a peculiar melancholy. To strangers in a land of which little was known they must have harboured dread and foreboding, calling up thoughts of a country to which many would never go back ; for the long months of labour took their toll and the Fosse Way had its roadside monuments.

One can picture the straggling line of workers, the groups by the half-made road beside the felled trees of the forest, the flint-layers and hewers of stone, or hear the tramp of soldiers moving westward in slow columns through a haze of dust, with the rattle of accoutrements and arms, as the way was completed.

At intervals along the route were outposts, stationed above the Valley of the Soar, along which the river shone as a thin streak among its woods ; and bivouacks lying back from the road where the ground had been cleared—all the seeming disorder and untidiness in the wake of great movements of troops. It was a period of consolidation and of establishing communications over a vast area of conquered enemy country.

Beside the Fosse Way the camp fires burned and their smoke blew along the ground as the smoke of the hedgers' fires blows to-day.

For centuries the country round Six Hills was crossed by the great metalled road, carrying traffic from Ratae through Vernometum to the West, but afterwards its use declined and the permanent way was disregarded. There followed that dark period, about which so little is known, when the Romans

finally left the country, and the roads they had made were abandoned to a more primitive people.

Saxon burials have been unearthed in the centre of Watling Street, near the turnpike leading from Rugby to Lutterworth, indicating that the Roman roads had fallen into comparative disuse. In these graves were found human skeletons, together with weapons, shield-bosses and spear-heads. which—apart from the Anglo-Saxon character of brooches found at the same time, and in

THE FOSSE WAY AT VERNOMETUM.

many similar burials—are proof of their origin; the Romans did not bury weapons with their dead.

In this connection the following quotation from the Victoria "History of the County of Leicester" is interesting: "While burials by the side of a great Roman highway may have been due to the same motives that lined the Via Appia near Rome with monuments of a more pretentious kind, burials in the centre of the road show that the traffic along it had declined at the time of the interments, or had perhaps ceased altogether. Such a disturbance of the road-metal would not, of course, impede an advance from the south by this route, but burials with brooches of the sixth century below the crown of the road illustrate in a graphic manner the changes that had taken place during the

century and a half since the Roman officials withdrew from Britain and left the province to its own resources in face of Teutonic invasion."

It was doubtless at this period that the Salt Way gradually disappeared, except for vague traces of it through Six Hills, leaving only the Fosse as a lasting monument to the Roman road-makers.

The place has now a somewhat desolate appearance. In every direction the straight white roads seem to continue their uneventful course for as many miles as the spectator cares to imagine. They seem to lead nowhere in particular, and to have no particular reason for meeting at this spot, following the scarcely noticeable undulations of the ground into blue and hazy distance.

Six Hills gives the impression of being in the centre of an undulating plateau in curious contrast to its present name, which is rather puzzling to those who do not know its original form. There is more reason for the name " Seg's Hill," for although the land slopes very gradually northward in the direction of Nottingham and Newark, on the west towards the Soar Valley, and southward down to Hoby Vale, there is a steeper fall of some two hundred feet. The hill itself is four hundred and forty-five feet high, rising further on in the direction of Grantham to over five hundred feet. But these differences of elevation are not apparent, and the character of the landscape suggests a rolling extent of country, unbroken except by the adjoining fox coverts and the small trees bordering the highways that are so constant a feature throughout Leicestershire. On the left of the narrow road leading to Barrow is the low plantation of Cradock's Ashes, and a few fields from the road, sloping down to the small valley previously mentioned, is Walton Thorns, while east of the road to Leicester (the Fosse Way) are the trees of Ragdale Wood in the Thrussington Wolds.

The inn at Six Hills is an object of glaring incongruity in such a quiet setting. It boasts a placard of quite alarming size advertising certain ales, and its name, " The Durham Ox," is written up in letters of such crudeness of hue that they can only have been designed to attract the attention of a wayfarer many miles from its promise of refreshment; while the colour of its red-brick walls vies with the pink coats of the hunting throng so often gathered round them, in startling contrast to the greys and greens of its setting. But all these discords are dwarfed to insignificance by the sober, monotonous hue and wide-stretching distances of the landscape.

The time to visit Six Hills to get the full quality of its atmosphere and restrained colour is in the bright cold weather that often comes with early March. There may be a thin coat of ice over the pools left by recent rains,

and if the mire churned up by horses' feet in the tracks leading to the coverts has been frozen to hard, unyielding ridges, the cold glitter of the March sun does little to soften them. It is the season when hunting is often stopped by frost, when the bunches of sedge rising from the grass close round the inn cast their shadows on silvered ground. Or there may be scarcely a frost, but a dull cold in the air, and perhaps a chill breath of wind that carries the

THE ROAD FROM VERNOMETUM TO WILLOUGHBY.

smoke of the hedgers' fires low over the fields. For the monotony of the landscape is broken here and there by a red glow and coiling eddies of smoke, where the thorn hedges are being trimmed and laid, the newly-cut wood shining a pale gold in the sun.

To see a Leicestershire hedger at work is to watch an expert at his job. He is not so picturesque as the old Sussex hedger with his smock and bill-hook and his venerable white beard—a truly pastoral figure whose work is little more than trimming the straggling briers and runners from a hedge

grown out of shape—but he is representative of that rapidly disappearing type, the skilled agricultural labourer. The thatcher has almost gone, and in many places the hedger too; in Leicestershire, however, the latter is a conspicuous figure in the early spring.

Every year a section of a thorn fence is cut and laid. The straggling growers of a bullfinch are lopped off, piled by the roadside, and fired, while the thorn-stems are cut half through close to the ground, bent over and passed between stakes, which are bound at the top with twisted strands of pliable wood that hold them together. The appearance of a newly-cut fence, with the half-severed layers exposing the white wood, is cold and naked, a formidable obstacle that will be responsible for many empty saddles when the hunting season comes round again. But if the new fence itself is ugly, the work of laying it gives a pleasant variety to the Leicestershire countryside. At Six Hills the lazy smoke of the hedgers' fires is the one distinctive note when looking down the long white roads.

The smoke blows away from the piled thorn branches with a peculiar quivering motion across the highway, blurring the outlines of trees in the opposite hedge. At intervals a tongue of flame shoots up through the haze, or, as the fire smoulders, a shower of sparks and red glowing embers is blown along the grass bordering the road, and the smoke thickens under a new pile of cuttings thrown on to the heap. Sometimes the figures of the men are outlined darkly behind the blue whirls and spirals that circle about them, sometimes their features catch a stray gleam and light up metallic and hard in the glow of the fire. Often their forms appear spectral and strange, distorted and all a-quiver among the bellying clouds of smoke, their eyes look dark or glitter above the flames, and the folds of their fustian coats glimmer in a confused light, shining red before the fire or deepening to a pale ochre under the wintry sun. Deftly they wield their billhooks with gloved hands or rake the scattered thorn twigs from the ditch at the roadside. They work for hours until the day wanes, and are often the only moving figures in the scene. About them is the acrid smell of charred wood, and a sudden warmth as the wind carries the heat of the fire now one way and now another.

Before darkness, when the embers die down and the last coil of smoke rises ghostly and white, perhaps the figure of an old man stands beside the fire, resting on his rake and gazing across the fields. At such an hour the presence of past memories is felt, casting its curious spell, and the solitary figure seems to be brooding over all that is gone, as though it might mysteriously come to life again.

Most countries are distinguished at some season of the year by the lighting of bonfires, and the particular season at which these fires are lit, and their use, remains in mind as a feature of the district. In Cornwall the moors are dotted with pyres of smoke during the "swayling," or burning of the furze which encroaches from the moorland over the small stone-walled fields, and has to be kept in check by this means. Readers of Thomas Hardy will call to mind the fifth of November fires on Egdon Heath, suggesting, not Guy Fawkes Day, but ancient signals to spread the alarm in case of invasion. Seen at night, he describes them: "Some were large and near, glowing scarlet red from the shade, like wounds in a black hide. Some were Mænades, with winy faces and blown hair." Thus in Leicestershire, the spring season has its fires, and the more imaginative will see in them something other than the burning of refuse from the trimmed hedges.

This is not a chapter about hunting, but perhaps it will recall to many who know the district described because of its hunting associations that other aspect of it—the pervading sense of remoteness referred to, when the past seems to come back and the present momentarily to fade away.

One of the charms of hunting is that the countryside loses its familiarity at times. During the excitement of a run there is little consciousness of time or place, or even of direction; and when a breathing space comes the surroundings often look strange until a familiar landmark is recognised. It would indeed be strange, though to those who know the tricks exhaustion sometimes plays not altogether unthinkable, if, as the landscape darkened and a belated rider pulled up his horse to get his bearings, he should see beside the hedger's smouldering fire a figure dimly outlined in its smoke, and recognise by glint of greaves and shining arms a Roman soldier—a sentry guarding the road to Vernometum.

But even if the rider is not subject to any weird fancies, his horse may start suddenly at what is after all only the old hedger resting on his rake, or perhaps the stump of a tree, distorted as the smoke blows past it.

And now to return to the inn at Six Hills, and a picture of the hunting field as those who live there see it, described as it was by a child. The two sketches which accompany this chapter were made on the same day, and the one of the inn occasioned the following little reminiscence. Before the sketch was finished, two little girls living at "The Durham Ox," the children of its tenants, watched with interest while the work progressed.

The elder of the two, aged seven, made so many remarks about the painting that it seemed a natural question to ask whether she painted herself. Her

THE WOLDS

reply was that she had a better picture of the inn made on a slate, which, after a little pressing, she fetched from the place where it was hidden away. On some pretext a new slate had been procured for common use, so that the picture might be preserved. The drawing showed great discrimination in the selection of the view, and considerable power of line. Not the least engaging part of its exhibition was the light-hearted manner in which she showed it—with pride, but with a careless pride, hastily hiding it behind her back as though one glance was enough. And once shown, it was forgotten. The subject of conversation changed.

A few days ago the Prince of Wales had stopped at the inn to telephone for his car. And here is a scene to complete this landscape of the Wolds, a touch of colour among its sombre tones; a scene vividly impressed upon a child's mind, perhaps to be recounted half a century hence to those who will listen, as to some thrilling tale of the past.

First, the crowd gathered round the courtyard, while hounds are working in the gorse; the sun shining on red coats and fresh, impatient horses. Then the first whimper of a hound, and a fox viewed across the road; the press of riders and the break away—away over a rail fence into the fields towards Walton Thorns. There is only one practicable place, and horse after horse goes over. Some tap the rail, others jump big with plenty to spare; the roadway gradually clears, and they are gone.

Then the end of the day and the return of a mud-splashed crowd—a few broken hats, a back or two like a ploughed field, horses in a lather and riders dismounted. Some of the more exhausted horses are given a pull of old Scotch ale at the inn, and well they deserve it.

Under the sign of "The Durham Ox" is a scene that might be back in the old coaching days. None of the cars has arrived; horses are waiting in the yard, there is the shine of saddles and steam rising up below the windows of the inn; girths are loosened and a few minor injuries examined. Groups of riders stand together discussing the hunt. And just one glimpse of the Prince of Wales, happiest of the lot—for none is happier in the hunting field than he—and perhaps a word or two at the door, a kind word, and a telephone call for the car. All this is remembered. And it is all told so simply.

"Such a nice boy—what a pity they mob him so"—that is the comment of people who like to think of him as one of themselves.

When the cars have come and gone, and the white roads fade in a grey cold twilight through which the firs of Ragdale Wood loom like shadows against the sky; when perhaps the hunted fox has crawled down the slope beneath

the undergrowth in Walton Thorns, hidden at last in the stillness, a newly-risen moon circling the covert with a belt of shade beyond the rides ; when the dwellers in the few scattered houses at the cross-roads have lit their lamps, and the inn cuts the skyline with its square walls, its crude sign and hoardings hidden from sight—somewhere out on the Wolds is the soldier of the Fosse Way.

He stands by the dead embers of the hedger's fire, where he left his bones on Seg's Hill.

CHAPTER V

QUORNDON

"It was at the commencement of the career of the 'great Meynell,' that the dawn of science began to cast its rays upon that system, out of which has grown the modern style of fox-hunting. . . ."—R. C. VYNER.

BEFORE giving a summary of the Tuesday country, which does not compare with the Monday or the Friday from a riding point of view—though to residents in Leicestershire, if not to visitors, the Forest hunting has a special attraction—a pause must be made at the famous village of Quorndon (always pronounced, and now spelt Quorn), for so long the home of the Quorn hounds.

According to White's "Leicestershire and Rutland," "Quorndon is a large village, township, and chapelry, in the Parish of Barrow-upon-Soar, and on the west side of the river Soar. . . . The drives and walks in the vicinity are extremely picturesque, and the prospects from some of the woody hills are extensive and varied. Quorndon Township comprises about 2131 acres of land, rising in bold and well-wooded hills, from the fertile meadows near the river; and had 1503 inhabitants in 1821; 1811 in 1841; and 1622 in 1861. Many of them are employed in framework knitting, etc., and Messrs. Balm, Hill & Co., lace and cotton tatting, etc., manufacturers, employ here about 100 hands. In old writings the manor is spelt Querne, Quernedon, etc. . . . Quorndon Hall, on the east side of the village, near the river Soar, is a plain mansion of white brick, which was purchased in 1750,* by H. Meynell, Esq., the celebrated sportsman, and was long occupied in the Hunting Season by the masters of the Quorndon Hunt."

Mr. Meynell hunted the Quorn country, then extending from Nottingham to Market Harborough, for forty-seven years, commencing in 1753. "He subsequently purchased Quorndon Hall from the Earl Ferrers, which had been previously occupied as a club, and to which many of the most fashionable

* The date should be about 1754.

men of the day belonged. On removing the establishment to that place they were designated the Quorn hounds." *

There is only one portrait existing of Hugo Meynell, the first Master of the Quorn, and none of his contemporaries has left a pen-picture of this great sportsman. As Thormanby remarks: "The Meynell of tradition looms dimly through the twilight of the past, a vague, shadowy figure, of giant proportions indeed, but as indistinct in outline as the figure of King Arthur, seen for the last time by Guinevere through the gathering murk and mist ere he went down 'To that great battle in the West.'"

It is possible, however, that a print which forms the frontispiece of the original pamphlet containing Robert Lowth's poem "Billesdon Coplow" published in 1830, may represent the hero of the great run of February 24th, 1800, the last year of Mr. Meynell's Mastership of the Quorn. The picture bears no title, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that the single figure standing by a gate in full hunting kit is intended for Hugo Meynell, drawn possibly from the artist's recollection of him, or from sketches made before his death in 1808. We are shown a tall, handsome man, faultlessly attired. He wears a long-tailed, single-breasted coat with rolled lapels, a white collar and blue necktie, a bright yellow waistcoat, with several inches showing below the last button of his coat, and yellow gloves. His tall hat is the conventional type of the period—Osbaldeston was the first Master of the Quorn to wear a hunting cap—and his boots have very long tops; in one hand he carries a crop, apparently bound with leather up to its handle. His white breeches are faintly striped and have three buttons, the top one being above the knee. It is because these details are carefully depicted that the picture seems intended to be a portrait.

In an introduction to Robert Lowth's poem, printed in the pamphlet referred to, the following paragraphs give a glimpse of social life at Quorndon Hall:

"In the year 1791, Mr. Meynell gave a splendid treat to a numerous party of nobility and gentry at Quorndon Hall. On the first day of hunting, his distinguished visitors attended him to covert near Stanford in Nottinghamshire, where there was an assembly of about 300 horsemen, and several ladies in carriages; among whom were the Duchess of Rutland, Marchioness of Salisbury, Countess of Essex, Countess Talbot, Countess of Sefton; the Marquis of Salisbury, the Earls of Essex, Talbot, Stair and Winchelsea; the Dukes of Bedford, Devonshire and Grafton; with many others of rank and fashion.

* Cecil's "Records of the Chase."

These noble visitors were his guests for about ten days; and the neighbourhood of Quorndon afforded peace and pleasure to the brilliant circle.

" In his method of managing a subscription pack, Mr. Meynell left no equal behind him. He had not only to humour but contend with many dashing young men of family and fortune who were continually racing against each other and riding before the hounds; by the force of his ridicule, and the pleasantry of his observations upon *such* a system of hunting, they were brought to order, and acknowledged their error. On two of the company who were riding *before* the hounds, he remarked: ' The hounds were *following* the gentlemen, who very kindly were gone *forward* to *see* what the fox was about.' "

Nimrod gives a different picture, more than ten years later, on almost the last occasion the veteran sportsman rode with hounds, after Lord Sefton had taken over the Mastership, but it is very brief and mainly concerns his quickness of ear. The anecdote commences during a run: " I observed Mr. Meynell very forward in this short sharp burst, frequently cheering as he went." After hounds had lost their fox, which was attacked and injured by a sheep dog and found drowned in a canal, the following incident occurred:

" The hounds were in a small covert, about a hundred yards from the place where he (Mr. Meynell) stood, which commanded a view of it. Lord Sefton went with the hounds and stood close to the gorse. A hound spoke, but he spoke cautiously. There was no cheer to him, so he was suspected; but ' one word ' (as we say) from a hound in a Leicestershire covert sets every man on the alert for a start . . . however, in this case the alarm was false, and Lord Sefton rode up to Mr. Meynell and asked him what hound spoke in the covert. ' I think it was Concord,' said Mr. Meynell. ' It was *not* Concord,' said Lord Sefton. ' He was at my horse's heels.' ' It was either Concord or Caroline ' (brother and sister, in their first year), replied Mr. Meynell. In five minutes the point was decided. Raven, the huntsman came up with the hounds. Lord Sefton asked the question. ' Concord, my Lord,' was the reply."

Mr. Delmé Radcliffe has left records of a few personal details, in the collection of which he was assisted by the Meynell family: " Mr. Meynell was somewhat particular in his diet . . . he endeavoured to take the greatest amount of nourishment in the smallest possible compass. His usual hunting breakfast consisted of as much as a small tea-cup would contain of a pound of veal, condensed to that quantity. His pocket was always fortified with a small bottle of stimulant, similar to that carried in the present day, but instead of eau-de-vie, curaçao, or cherry bounce, it contained a far better stomachic,

in the shape of *veritable tincture of rhubarb*, to the use of which he was much addicted." Of his horses, the same writer says : " Some of his best horses in 1792 were Miller ; Tom-Tit ; Harry Punt—died after a hard day at Widmerpool, March 21st, 1795 ; Leveller Joe, a chestnut mare ; Mr. Fitzherbert's horse. He also had a particularly clever hack mare, which he rode to covert, and which was ridden also by the late Marchioness of Salisbury." And Thormanby comments that " there are different opinions as to Mr. Meynell's proficiency as an elegant horseman ; but it was never disputed that his progress over a

QUORN WOOD FROM THE GOLF LINKS.

country was, like the whole course of his life, straightforward." There are brief references to him as a perfect English gentleman, as well as a model Master of Hounds—in the words of one of his friends : " As much at home at St. James's as he was at Quorndon—or at Ashby Pastures." From these and similar fragments we must piece together a portrait of this " Father of Fox-hunting."

Concerning the traditions he has left and the Meynellian science of hunting, a great deal has been written, too long for quotation here. He was the first to introduce the quick style of hunting. In his day hard riding first came into vogue, much to the disgust of sportsmen of the old school, who complained that it frequently resulted in the loss of foxes.

The distances covered in Meynell's day, when the country was less enclosed, were far greater than in the present time, or even in the time of his successor, Lord Sefton, when foxes frequently ran in circles from one covert to another, as the number of these was increased. To quote again from Cecil : " It was said to be the custom of Mr. Meynell to have the hounds taken, the night before hunting, to the immediate vicinity of the coverts which they were to draw on the following day, even if the distances were not more than a few miles. This, however, requires an explanation. The country was so extensive that several out-kennels were imperative ; hound vans and railways were luxuries not then dreamt of. Besides the home kennels at Quorn, those at Bowden Inn were retained, which are more than twenty miles distant, and the Bradley kennels, convenient for a portion, which has been for many years within Mr. Meynell Ingram's boundary, were over thirty miles. The accommodation at Bradgate was in all probability rendered by Lord Stamford, who also kept hounds ; but a few miles only separated the two kennels."

It has been truly said that a man who hunted with the Quorn under Hugo Meynell had little idea where he would sleep at the end of the day.

The Mastership of the Quorn was taken by the second Earl of Sefton in 1800, from which year dates a period of magnificence and style that far exceeded anything heard of before in the fox-hunting world. It was a period when the driving of four-in-hands was in great vogue, and Lord Sefton was a master of the art. A meet of hounds was often attended by the Master, and several other noblemen and gentlemen, all driving splendid teams, when the fixture could be approached on wheels. Lord Sefton is said to have introduced the practice of second horses, Mr. Meynell and the hunt servants having to go through the day with one apiece, but, as Mr. Blew remarks, the custom goes back as far as the time of Henry VIII, who once tired out eight horses in a day while hunting, and the term " second " horse is actually used in an account of a run with the Charlton hounds in 1738. The practice, however, was generally adopted with the Quorn in Lord Sefton's time and has continued ever since. Lord Sefton also had two packs of hounds and two huntsmen—John Raven, whom he took over from Mr. Meynell, and Stephen Goodall.

In 1805 Quorndon Hall and all its appurtenances were sold to Lord Foley, whose career as a Master of Hounds in Leicestershire was very short, his place being taken by the famous Mr. Thomas Assheton Smith in 1807. Assheton Smith is more famous as a rider than as a huntsman—he actually hunted his own hounds, being the first Master to do so in Quorn country—and perhaps

his greatest claim to immortality is his manner of riding over Leicestershire fences and his saying that " any fence can be got over with a fall."

Ten years later, in 1817, the Hall and the country passed to Squire Osbaldeston, who shares with Mr. Meynell the first place in the glorious traditions of Leicestershire.

Of him at least we have a striking portrait from the pen of Thormanby :

" I shall not easily forget my first sight of ' The Squire.' I was never so painfully disillusioned and disappointed in my life. It was on Newmarket Heath, eight and thirty years ago, that there was pointed out to me a figure which, I was told with bated breath, was that of ' the greatest all-round sportsman of his own or any age.' And what I saw was *this*—a short, square, dumpy little old man, with shrivelled, shrunken frame, round shoulders, and limping gait, with a hard, disagreeable face, the features of which were almost as battered as those of an old-time prize-fighter, and dressed in loose, ill-fitting, shabby garments which looked as if they had been picked up at an old clothes shop." Osbaldeston was then seventy-two, and gave little indication of the marvellous physical powers which enabled him to excel in every manly sport, but, as the writer continues : " Perhaps, had I seen ' the Squire ' in the flower of his manhood, when his well-knit, muscular figure was in its perfection, before a hundred accidents by flood and field had crippled and deformed his frame, I might have found more correspondence between the real man and my ideal. But I should think that, even in his prime, George Osbaldeston's personal appearance must have disappointed those who, having heard of his matchless prowess as an all-round sportsman, saw him for the first time. For there was nothing big or imposing about him. But, if there was not much of him, what there was all was ' wire and whipcord.' As I heard an old Manx fisherman once quaintly put it : ' God packs his best stuff in small parcels.' And better ' stuff ' than George Osbaldeston was made of it would be hard to find."

Nimrod describes at length a visit to Quorndon Hall when " the Squire " resided there, and expresses his admiration for the stables " said to be 300 ft. in length " with stalls for thirty horses—" a well-polished watering bridle, neatly folded up, hung on the right side of each horse, and there is a patent lamp between every fourth stall "—and he comments on the smartness and cleanliness of the whole establishment. Among the horses in the stable was Cervantes, the horse which gave Mr. Osbaldeston the fall in which he broke his leg, Nimrod being one of those who witnessed his disaster : " I saw him on the ground with his leg broken, the bone protruding through the skin, with

his boot full of blood, and with every prospect of immediate amputation being necessary. He bore it like a man; but one remarkable expression escaped him: 'I am so unlucky,' said he (having only just then recovered from another bad fall—and to the regimen he had been undergoing in consequence of it, was he, perhaps, indebted for the preservation of his limb), 'that I *think* I shall give up hunting.'" The way he "gave it up" was to hunt his own hounds six days a week for many seasons thereafter.

In 1821, Mr. Osbaldeston took over the Hambledon country from Sir Bellingham Graham, to whom he sold the establishment at Quorn, but returned to Leicestershire and his previous Mastership in 1823.

Here is a picture of the Master's attire in the hunting field from Nimrod: "I found him attired in precisely what a Master of Hounds ought to be; that is, clad in what is necessary to comfort and convenience, without any superfluous attempts at 'effect,' and although hats were the fashion of the day for gentlemen, he wore a cap similar to those of the men; an unassuming single-breasted coat, white cords, with top-boots, neither peculiar for their whiteness nor any eccentricity of shade, comprised the Squire's costume."

The quick style of hunting inaugurated by Meynell was continued with even greater vigour by Osbaldeston, and it is because of their proficiency in this—the only way to show real sport in Leicestershire—that these two men will always be regarded as the shining stars of the Quorn. To get hounds away at once after a fox has broken covert, to force the fox off his point in the first sharp burst, and, with anything like a scent, to account for him in half an hour or forty minutes, was the method these men pursued; as opposed to the slow hunt of two or three hours' duration which was the method of the older school. Nimrod says of Osbaldeston: "When hounds came to a check, his cast was a bold one, quick and decisive, and by this means he either hit the scent again immediately, or lost his fox."

Leicestershire was becoming known as the country for pace, and those who hunted there expected hounds to go sufficiently fast to get away from their horses. When the pace was excessively hot, it was the Squire's joy to call out to his field: "Now ride! why the devil don't you ride over them now?"

And so we must leave this great little man, with his hunting cap and his buff-toned white cords, mounted on his faithful Cervantes; his hounds going like a streak of white past the oxers and bullfinches, which had become a feature of Leicestershire since Meynell's day, and their Master and huntsman in one taking fence after fence, with a wave of his cap and a derisive challenge to his field who followed behind. They got all they wanted in the way of

pace—muddy backs, hats broken, and horses blown in their effort to live with hounds—and the result is a lasting tradition for Leicestershire, and Osbaldeston's fame.

Lord Southampton took over the country in 1827, and in 1830 new kennels were built at Leicester, where the hounds were removed; and instead of being called the Quorn, they were called Lord Southampton's hounds. A year later Sir Harry Goodricke became Master, and there was another removal of the kennels, this time to Thrussington.

An interesting contemporary record of the building of the new kennels is contained in Curtis's "Topographical History": "At the close of the season 1830–31, Lord Southampton abdicated the direction of the Melton Hunt, and it was consigned to Sir Harry Goodricke, in terms too just to be subject to the imputation of flattery. The kennels at Leicester, built by Lord Southampton, are forsaken, and new ones are now building at Thrussington, a rural village on the Wreke, nearly equidistant from Leicester and Melton. Such is the interest now taken in this sport that the discoveries of science are to be embodied in this structure. As an equality of temperature is found to be of importance to the health of the hounds when in shelter and repose, the new kennels are to be covered with reeds, as affording the best mode of preserving a more uniform state of the internal air in all seasons."

At this period the hounds were conveyed to covert in a van, and the same writer, in a rather entertaining paragraph, comments on the increase in the number of fences:

"The celebrity which Leicestershire has acquired for this alluring, yet expensive diversion, probably arose from a concurrence of favourable local circumstances, not the least of which is its fine undulating surface, containing no inaccessible elevations—no dangerous declivities or precipices—no broad, deep, rapid, impassable rivers—and few woods. Before enclosures became so general, this sport must have often afforded as high gratification to the by-standers as to the hunters themselves. There must have been many situations within the compass of the hunt, where a spectator might have stood, seen, and enjoyed almost a day's sport, or at least with a few short removals, might have generally kept it within range of his vision. This is now impracticable, and the labour and perils of the chase are in consequence increased by the additional number of fence leaps which have resulted from enclosures; these, however, form no very dangerous impediments, being generally of quickset. It is singular that, perilous as hunting may seem to the uninitiated, few serious accidents occur, and fatal ones are rare. There have probably been more

limbs broken and dislocated, and more lives lost in travelling by stage coaches in one year, than the history of Fox Hunting has recorded in a century.

" The Quorn, or Melton hounds, range over a part of Nottinghamshire south of the Trent, and the greater part of Leicestershire, with the exception of part of the Framland Hundred to the north-east, reserved for the Duke of Rutland's excellent pack, and the opposite extremity of the country, which is within the scope of Lord Anson's, now Mr. Applewaite's range. Whilst the Quorn hounds were under the direction and management of Lord Southampton the dogs were taken to covert in a commodious carriage built for the purpose, and it is expected the same plan will continue to be adopted."

Sir Harry Goodricke died suddenly in Ireland at the age of thirty-seven, leaving all his property to Mr. Francis Lyttleton Holyoake, who took over the Mastership of the Quorn in 1833. At this time the Donington country was separated from the rest, and hunted by another pack under the Marquis of Hastings. Two seasons later Mr. Holyoake (who had taken the name of Goodricke) was succeeded by Mr. Errington, who kept the hounds until Lord Suffield became Master in 1838. He bought a new pack of hounds for 2,500 guineas, and was lavish in his expenditure on the whole establishment—new stabling and kennels were erected at Billesdon ; but, unfortunately, the hounds and hunt servants being strange to the country, the sport shown was disappointing.

A year later, another pack was hunted in Leicestershire, under Mr. Hodgson, who returned to the older method of hunting which had been superseded in this country, allowing his hounds to work up to their fox. Mr. Hodgson adopted, according to Cecil, a peculiar costume when Master of Hounds in Leicestershire, wearing a brown coat and strong tanned leather knee-caps, his appearance being in striking contrast to the very smart get-up of his field. He gave as reason for this get-up the fact that, having hunted his own hounds before coming to the Shires, he did not wish them to recognise and follow him instead of their new huntsman !

This somewhat eccentric gentleman only remained in the country for two seasons, when he was followed by Mr. Greene of Rolleston, who, in his turn, was succeeded by Sir Richard Sutton in 1847. Already celebrated in the Burton and Cottesmore countries, Sir Richard removed his own hounds from the latter to the kennels at Quorndon, taking the name which had been discarded for so many years, and calling them the Quorn Hounds. The Donington country was restored to the Hunt a few years later.

There is not space here to record the changes of Mastership which followed

all too rapidly—Sir Richard Sutton dying in 1855—but the Quorn hounds, having been restored to their kennels and title, something of the earlier glories of Quorndon returned. The Quorn kennels were used for successive packs under many Masters for more than half a century, including the whole period when they were hunted by the great Tom Firr, until his retirement in the season 1898–99, as the result of a fall.

The new Quorn kennels at Pawdy Cross-roads were completed in 1905, and the hounds were moved there in the following year.

The village of Quorn had grown into almost a small town and was no longer a suitable place for a pack of hounds. Its cottages and quiet streets had changed to rows of shops and busy thoroughfares, standing as it does on the main road from Leicester, through Mountsorrel, to Loughborough. Passing through the intricate streets of the birthplace of modern hunting to-day, between the walls of its red-brick houses, with the sound of the motor traffic on the main road an ever-present reminder of a busy world, it is difficult to imagine the Quorndon of the past. It gave its name to the famous Hunt, but has itself been claimed by other things than sport. Where the hooting of cars and the roar of trains comes discordant to the ear, there once echoed the talk and laughter of the gay cavalcade that set out on a hunting morning from Quorndon Hall. At night, when all is still, perhaps they live again, and the old walls hear the tramping of their horses, the ghostly padding of hounds, and the cheery voices of Meynell and Osbaldeston.

CHAPTER VI

CHARNWOOD FOREST

"Charnwood is now visited by numbers of invalids from all parts of the kingdom during the summer months. The height of the range renders the air pure and light, so that constitutions affected by a confined and close atmosphere feel instant relief, and the salubrity of the air is soon manifested in their ruddy countenances."—OLD DIRECTORY.

THE Tuesday and Saturday countries of the Quorn are essentially provincial, as opposed to the Shires. The former includes Charnwood Forest, to a description of which this chapter will be mainly devoted, the boundary between the two countries being the Ashby-Loughborough road. On the east, the Tuesday country is divided from the Monday and Friday by the Soar, and on the south and west, the hunt boundary has already been given.

Fifteen years ago, during Captain Forrester's time, part of the Tuesday country was lent to Lord Harrington for four or five seasons. This notable old gentleman, who was short of "country," hunted it two days a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. On the outbreak of the Great War, the arrangement lapsed.

The old thoroughfare known as High Cross Road leads out of Leicester, under the railway bridge, and across the Rothley Brook to Groby, on the outskirts of the Forest. Its ultimate destination is Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

Just outside Groby is a quarry; great slabs of cliff, where the rock has been blasted away, tower over the lines of the small railway where a few empty trucks are standing, apparently about to fall.

Lying to the south-west, dark and sombre, is Martinshaw Wood. On the red soil below it flocks of sheep are resting, in quiet contrast to the highway with its traffic of cars and lorries, on the opposite side of which is the fine lake known as Groby Pool. The lake is set among wooded hills, close to the grounds of Bradgate House, with Lady Hay Wood, Sheet Hedges Wood, and many others—their names quaint or picturesque—crowding the slopes beyond the village of Newtown Linford and Bradgate Park.

Situated at the south-eastern angle of the Forest, and containing the ruins

of the Hall and domestic chapel, Bradgate Park was formerly a seat of the Lords Grey, of Groby, and is famous as having been the home of Lady Jane Grey. It is said that the trees in front of the Hall were lopped or pollarded at the time of her execution, and the boles can still be seen some twenty feet in height or less, shorn of their topmost branches. The Hall was built in the early part of the sixteenth century by Thomas Lord Grey, and was occupied by his descendants until, according to tradition, it was set on fire by the wife of the Earl of Suffolk. The story runs as follows in Throsby's "History of Leicestershire": "Some time after the Earl had married, he brought his Lady to his seat at Bradgate; her sister wrote to her desiring to know 'how she liked her habitation?' The Countess of Suffolk wrote for answer, 'that the house was tolerable, that the country was a forest, and the inhabitants all brutes.' The sister, in consequence, by letter desired her 'to set fire to the house, and run away by the light of it.'"

On the north side of the ruins, which consist chiefly of two towers connected by a low wall, is all that remains of the great hall, broken fragments covered with ivy; the foundations of other buildings are visible, and at the south-east corner are the remains of an octagonal tower. In the chapel are entombed several ancestors of the house of Groby, some of the monuments and recumbent effigies being in a good state of preservation.

A rocky eminence stands in the centre of the park, upon the summit of which a tower was built about one hundred and fifty years ago, known as Old John. This counterfeit ruin, built in imitation of the keep of an old castle, is a landmark visible for many miles.

Charnwood Forest, called in old writings Charley Forest, is thus mentioned by Leland: "First I cam oute of *Brodegate* Parke into the Foreste of *Charley*, communely caullid *the Wast*. This foreste is a XX miles or more in cumpace, having plenty of woode . . ." and further on he says: "In this foreste is no good Towne nor scant a Village."

Charnwood was indeed a waste in Leland's time, when he inscribed his famous "Itinerary" to King Henry VIII, nearly three centuries before its enclosure in 1808.

During that period the Forest has been described as having the appearance of a rugged wilderness, especially on its western side near Whitwick. The great rocks stood out among rolling hills covered over their whole extent with fern and gorse, like the tors on Dartmoor to-day, while the low ground, in places wet and boggy, was carpeted with "a kind of stunted black heath." The land afforded grazing for a small breed of sheep, called Forest sheep (now

nearly extinct in the district); and a certain number of cattle, young horses, and mules were reared upon it by farmers and cottagers of the adjacent parishes, some of whom "paid a trifling acknowledgment to the Lord of the Manor."

After leaving Bradgate, and passing through wooded country by the beautiful ruins of Ulverscroft Priory, the next village is Copt Oak, at four cross-ways, where the road to Whitwick is intersected by that from Bardon to Loughborough. Copt Oak figures regularly in the list of Quorn Tuesday

GISBORNE'S GORSE, LOOKING WEST.

fixtures, a wood of the same name facing the village. The name is derived from the fact that up to the year 1855 an ancient oak tree stood behind the church, the roots of which still remain. While it was customary at one time to ascribe anything ancient and inexplicable to the Druids, one would like to believe the tradition—if only on account of the great age which it gives to the tree—that this oak was once a Celtic Tau. The trunk, which was twenty-four feet in circumference, had been cut through, leaving only two branches on either side, the Druidical symbol taking the form of a cross. In later times, the tree is said to have marked the place of assemblage where Eric the Forester incited his armed bands to face the Norman invasion; and it has definite

historic interest as being the rallying point for the local forces collected by the Earl of Stamford during the Civil War.

A mile beyond Copt Oak are the quarries and woods of Bardon Hill, the ground rising to a height of over nine hundred feet. Here the landscape of Charnwood Forest is seen at its best and wildest, a country of trees and rocks and bracken. On the left, against the sky, is the striking outline of Markfield Knoll and the spoil heaps of the Markfield quarries, beneath which the houses of the village are clustered, the sharp steeple of the church rising among the trees. To the south-west is a wide view over the Atherstone country; north-west lie Whitwick and Coalville, on the edge of the Leicestershire coal district. It is a bewildering landscape, little suggestive of hunting; brown gorse and pink-belled heather clothe the ancient rock, which everywhere crops out in miniature tors and crags—High Tor and Peldar Tor, in the Warren Hills; High Cademan and High Sharpley further to the north. Birch trees stand out upon their rugged slopes among heather and bilberries.

Seen from the top of Sharpley, far beyond Grace Dieu, is the Quorn Saturday country, spread like a vast map, marked here and there by the white ribbon of a road, and scarred by the distant face of a quarry or the slopes of a gigantic spoil heap, shining pink and pale orange in the sun. Far below is Blackbrook Reservoir, faintly dotted with white swans floating on its surface.

This reservoir was originally constructed to supply water to a canal which traversed the north side of the Forest, but was never used.

Many very interesting remains were found during the making of a road round Bardon Hill, including a copper spearhead, and chisel-shaped tools of the same metal, each with a ring attached, through which was probably passed a thong of leather. A battle-axe was also found. On Sharpley's summit, with the broken and jagged rock piled among the bracken, it is easy to picture such figures as these relics suggest, clambering cautiously from stone to stone, and gazing over the wild landscape below.

At the four cross-roads near Mount St. Bernard, Ives Head comes boldly into view, the stone-walled field below it leading up to a wide stretch of bracken surmounted by the dark mass of the crag; and close to the Cistercian Abbey of St. Bernard, founded in 1835, are the fantastic rocks of Mount Calvary.

From this fine panorama, we turn aside to the little village of The Oaks. This is said to mark the centre of Charnwood Forest. The church was built in 1815, and has the distinction of having been consecrated on June 18th of that year, the day on which the Battle of Waterloo was fought.

There is no pleasanter fixture in the district than when hounds meet at

GONE TO GROUND

Oaks Church, to the west of which, climbing a slope that rises to six hundred feet, is Gisborne's Gorse.

Here is a spot for a glimpse of typical Forest hunting, a fine morning drawing quite a crowd to this picturesque meet; the road between the Gorse and Charley Knoll is freely sprinkled with red coats. A quarter of a mile from the church, hounds are assembled at a point where the road forks; the village of The Oaks, clearly silhouetted upon rising ground, and the dark shadow of Gisborne's Gorse, which is in reality a large wood, culminating in the rocks of Timberwood Hill, being the most conspicuous features in the Forest landscape. Hounds move off, followed by the field, to the heights at the northern end of the wood, and a whip canters across the broad stretch of grass under its shadow, where a stone wall runs up the hill to its southern corner. Above the wood, a rocky eminence holds a few spectators, who appear as minute silhouettes on the crest of the tor. Down the sweep of fields descending to the road nothing moves; only the whip's scarlet coat gleams brightly against the shade of the trees.

The whimpering of hounds in covert sets everyone on the alert, and away goes the fox, leaping down from the boundary wall and streaking across the broad meadow towards Charley Knoll. Out come the hounds, some from the wood, others brought up by the huntsmen along its eastern edge, over the wall and away, with a burst of music that echoes across the valley. First one, then another of the leading riders leaps the wall; there is a rattle of stones and drumming of hoofs on the grass. Some of the field who have left the ride at the top gallop down the slope, but the main body take the low ground, over a few fences, across the road, and on towards the woods round Nanpantan.

Here the fox goes to earth in the depths of Longcliffe Wood; through the trees on the hill-top come horses and riders, trampling over the dead leaves, gradually assembling in a group above the steep declivity that leads down to the rhododendrons. Rays of sun slant across masses of dark leaves, and up from the hollow comes the chorus of hounds; the red coats of huntsmen and whips gleam through the tangled branches, their horses threading a way down the slope. Dust rises from the shadows below, leaves and earth mingling where the hounds worry and press in clamorous excitement round their fox, and—strange to say—he escapes before the terrier who has come to the rescue can rout him out. Branches crash and leaves part as though a storm swept through them as the pack plunges forward. The woods echo for a brief space to the cracking of twigs, and the whole hunt sweeps round the hill and on across the vale below. Nanpantan rocks loom above the trees, grim and silent,

while scarlet specks wind away from field to field, until they are lost to sight among the hills, appearing again on the distant slope by the Out Woods beyond the reservoir.

A sad memory will always be associated with the Forest—it was while cub-hunting early in the autumn of 1898, almost the first day of the season, that Tom Firr met with the bad fall which was to end his long service with the

STONE WALL FROM GISBORNE'S GORSE TO THE OAKS ROAD.

Quorn. His horse landed on a loose stone after jumping a wall, and pitching sideways, threw Firr on to his head. Although it was hoped at the time that his injuries were not serious, he never carried the horn again.

A prominent feature in the landscape near the Out Woods is Beacon Hill, another bracken-covered eminence, crowned with the schistose rocks—a species of primitive slate so typical of the district. Across the road to Woodhouse and Quorn is Broombriggs Hill, and below Broombriggs is a well-known landmark, an old wooden windmill immediately facing the village of

Woodhouse Eaves. The locality is famous for the Charley Forest whetstones —hones or whetstones being found in large quantities at Whittle Hill, north of the Beacon. The village is one of the largest in the Forest, lying at the foot of the rocky heights, from the summits of which Lincoln and Coventry cathedrals are visible on a clear day. The range crowned by Broombriggs and Beacon Hills, and the long line of the Out Woods lying north of its last heights, form the mountainous prospect seen from the ridge above the valley of the

WINDMILL HILL.

Wreake, and dominate, as a distant background, the famous hunting fields of pastoral Leicestershire.

A road runs from Woodhouse Eaves to Ulverscroft, passing the fine covert of Benscliffe Wood, overlooking Bradgate Park ; and turning to the left through Newtown Linford, circles by Anstey and Cropston, skirting Cropston Reservoir, and so into the village of Swithland.

Swithland Wood lies on the left, below Roecliffe Hall, and turning sharp to the right in the village, past Crow Wood, the road crosses the reservoir, a broad sheet of water, with the trees of the heronry rising from an island close by the railway embankment. On the water are many kinds of duck, and

great crested grebe swim gracefully along its margin. Scudding over the surface, shovelers and pockard leave the sedge, where wild swans nest, and join a group of black tufted duck far out in the centre of the lake. A grey sheen is blown across the water, small waves lap against the banks, or break in miniature crests of foam against the culverts of the railway bridge. Flying across to the trees on the island, a heron passes with slow-beating wings.

During a hard winter, great numbers of birds come over from the Lincolnshire coast to the Forest reservoirs. The rare Bewick's swan was seen in considerable numbers at Swithland in 1904, and again a few years later, while smew and that rare straggler, the harlequin duck, have occasionally been recorded, the latter at Groby Pool.

Beyond the reservoir is the stately Quorn Wood, called on maps Buddon Wood, climbing its rocky bed to a height at its centre of four hundred feet, and sloping northward down to the grounds of Quorn House.

A few fields west of Quorn Wood is Beaumanor Park, for centuries the home of the Herrick family, and associated with the names of the poet and Dean Swift. Beyond the level grass of the Park, with its fine elm trees, are the Hanging Stone rocks and the golf course.

The high ground here affords another wide panorama, looking back over Quorn Wood and Mountsorrel, across the Soar, to the Wolds and the Friday country.

CHAPTER VII

FRIDAY COUNTRY

" The Fox was strong, he was full of running,
He could run for an hour and then be cunning,
But the cry behind him made him chill,
They were nearer now and they meant to kill.

. . . . . .

" And all the way, that wild high crying,
To cold his blood with the thought of dying,
The horn and the cheer, and the drum-like thunder
Of the horse-hooves stamping the meadows under."—MASEFIELD.

ON entering the confines of the Friday country from Melton, the name that at once comes to mind is associated with a Monday fixture—the great opening meet of the season held on the first Monday of each November at Kirby Gate.

" There is always much that is bright and cheerful at Kirby Gate," writes Brooksby. " The first flush of pink, the first glitter of snowy buck-skin, lend a gaiety to the scene, that alone is refreshing and inspiriting. That the gathering is attractive as a show, is amply evidenced by the regularity with which it is brought to do duty as an annual picnic for Leicester and the country round."

Kirby Gate is less than half a mile on the Melton side of the village of Kirby Bellars, and received its name from the fact that two tall gates once stood there—one across the Melton-Leicester turnpike, and the other across the road to Thorpe Satchville. The gates were removed about fifty years ago.

Brooksby devotes pages in one of his books to this opening meet, and his descriptions are so happy that for those who do not know them a few more extracts may not be out of place—this author is so delightful to read that it is difficult to resist quotation. Commenting on the crowd which never fails to turn up, he writes : " With pleasant weather, and a right good day's sport, the Quorn never opened their season more auspiciously. Excellent sport indeed they had had for a fortnight previous ; but the first Monday in November is their gala day ; and is—why I cannot tell—the earliest occasion on which more than half their regular followers can be induced to attend.

This matter of toilet can possess no great charm for them—certainly after their first completed season. The old soldier wears his uniform only when duty compels him; the last-joined ensign (or whatever answers to him in a territorial cadre) is never happy out of it. No. They would seem to regulate their arrival by some such hidden law as governs the coming of the woodcocks—reducing it to practise in the form of the 'first Monday in November,' much as the latter may be expected with the first north-east wind in the month. I fear that these November sportsmen find the fences anything but clear of darkening leaf and tangled grass even now. As a matter of fact, the country is little less blind than ever; while the ground is rapidly becoming deep and holding—the latter condition being really a much more fruitful cause of grief than the former."

The crowd is somewhat embarrassing to anyone who has never hunted in the Shires, and the following is an apt comment on what to expect and how to behave—a novice in the famous Friday country will do well to take it to heart: "Here the fences came quick and close, and jumping enthusiasts (a heading which on occasion may no doubt claim to include us all) at length had their fling—and, as Artemus Ward might have put it, they flung. It is not apropos of this particular period—though it is certainly apropos of the day, and wholly unprompted by the smart of any personal injury—I remark there are two essential points in riding to hounds in this country, that strangers making their first, or a casual essay in it are too apt to disregard, or with which they have at least failed to make themselves conversant. The one is—*taking your turn* at a fence; the other, holding a gate open till the next comer can catch it. Of course the chances are they come out of countries where the fences can be jumped anywhere, and where the gates are never the sole means of exit for a large body of horsemen. But they would do well (if I may be forgiven for putting it so plainly) to realise that where, as in the Midlands, a single gap is the only place at which a fence can be jumped, and where gates are often the only possible outlet, the immense fields which they come to swell cannot possibly get quickly and fairly over a country, unless each individual will take only his own turn, and is ready to pass on the assistance that he expects from his predecessor."

For half a century or more it has been the custom after the opening meet to draw the covert known as Gartree Hill, marked on old maps as Gartree Hill Gorse (an exception was made in 1924, when, owing to foot and mouth disease restrictions, Brooksby Spinney was first drawn); to obtain a clear view of its position, the best way to reach the covert is from Cottesmore country.

A NASTY PLACE INTO THE MELTON ROAD, NEAR KIRBY GATE

There is no approach to the realms of the Quorn to equal that by the road from Whissendine to Wild's Lodge. After crossing the Melton-Oakham road, where it runs over the low ground which is the south-west limit of the Burton Flats, the Quorn-Cottesmore boundary is reached—that mystic line which nobody has ever seen. At this point it runs up to the apex of a sharp angle in the Flats, not far from Wild's Lodge. But to the eye it is the long ridge, on the southernmost end of which is visible the grassy summit above the covert of Gartree Hill, and which runs up to Melton, with an offshoot to Burton, that proclaims the Friday country of the Quorn. Rising above the flat meadows, it is a prominent and striking landmark.

Looking south-west are the hills of the Cottesmore, that sink to the Somerby road and rise again to the woods of Little Dalby. Proceeding along the high road to Melton, parallel to the Quorn boundary, which is about a mile to the left, we turn off along Sandy Lane. The road drops down to a vale, but we follow a branch lane that climbs above it. The little valley soon dies out and the whole ridge rises united in one *massif*, on the south slope of which, just ahead over the brow, is Gartree Hill. The ridge is here four hundred feet, extending to Great Dalby, where it rises to its highest summit.

Eastward a fine landscape opens to the view; in the foreground runs the grassy track which is the last lap for that eager, first-Monday-in-November crowd from Kirby Gate. One can see them as they approach the first covert to be drawn on the eventful day, riding four-deep through the landscape which still recalls the colours of autumn—colours faded with the touch of winter, but giving a glowing richness to the rolling Friday country and adding a glamour to the scene and the occasion. As hounds approach covert, the November sun shining on their flanks and feathered sterns, all present can feel the thrill which expectation gives to the first day's real hunting of the season—for many literally the first day, when they find themselves once again among the familiar fields and fences. All appears fresh—as though spring rather than winter was approaching. Scenes which recall many memories are recognised, some pleasant, others the reverse; every field, every fence, every tree holds a reminiscence for somebody in that throng. Those to whom the landmarks are strange see them for the first time under such conditions with a feeling akin to awe. There is nothing quite like the sensations of a man who feels a saddle between his knees, a good horse under him, and a certain tingling expectation within, as for the first time the turf slips past him on the way through Quorn country to Gartree Hill.

And here we must look at the setting for this pageant of the hunting field.

To the south is Little Dalby, its tall steeple high above the trees. On the slope below the village is Wheathill Spinney in the Cottesmore, and beyond, on the skyline, are the trees that bound the eighty acre field that leads to Leesthorpe. The horizon sweeps eastward, the landscape receding past Jericho Lodge, and then with rolling contour away towards Laxton's Covert, almost out of sight. Below are the Burton Flats, covered with mist and fading into obscurity, while far away on the left, rising just above the swelling fields, are the heights of the Monday Quorn. Westward are the roofs and chimneys of Great Dalby, and on the skyline the dark crest of Ashby Pastures.

Gartree Hill is a covert of blackthorn and briers, with low ash trees in

NEAR GARTREE HILL.

their midst, circling round the south and east slopes of the hill. Is there any other covert in the world, or any meet other than the opening day of the Quorn, when a man's heart is more likely to be in his mouth? Even old hands are not proof against a feeling of tension in the air, much less so the novice, in stiff new war-paint, among a crowd of an immensity and pushfulness of which he had not dreamed.

Providence has ordained that each November an expectant and rather nervy host shall collect on the summit of a small hill-top. He is a wise man who keeps a stiff lip, and a reasonably steady pulse, and when the shrill holloa comes, giving a double relief—relief that there is a fox, and relief from suspense—ensures that he is so placed that the headlong gallop downhill finds him in the first half dozen through the gate, and holding a leading position over the Flats. It is a good start for the season—may he keep it!

From Gartree we take the road to Great Dalby and then the lane that leads past Sir Francis Burdett's Covert—a spinney of oak and ash lying on the upper reaches of Burton Brook, which has its source on the Burrough heights. The lane comes out on a road that runs left to Little Dalby, and right to Gunn's Lodge. No area is more familiar, it is almost common ground to two Hunts. Across the field opposite is Burrough Wood, its varied growth of oak, ash, birch, spruce, larch and sycamore clinging to the flanks of Burrough Hill. Here it can be clearly seen how the vale, on which the lower part of Great Dalby stands, originating from the Wreake, comes winding through the high ground to join the meadows, that have spread like an arm of the sea from the Burton Flats, touching the base of Gartree and Little Dalby—opposite to each other—then flowing on below Salter's Hill, beyond whose clear skyline Adam's Gorse is concealed, and touching the base of Burrough heights. Behind, just east of Burrough Wood, is the ironstone escarpment, covered with a scattered growth of thorn and gorse, and running on to the Punch Bowl beyond its crest. We return the way we came, in order to follow the ridge along which runs the Melton-Great Dalby road. Old Gaudeloupe lies on the right, and the rifle-range close by; and so the highest point of the ridge is reached, four hundred and twelve feet. Part of Great Dalby lies in the valley below, the rest of this pleasant old village climbing up the western slope.

No village is more associated with the cry of hounds and the sound of galloping hoofs. The fields leading down to it are small and their slopes steep; Great Dalby often comes as a surprise during a run, and a man must know his own mind, and make his decisions quickly, to get clear and keep his place. The villagers too have their surprises and sudden excitements: "Killed in Great Dalby village" are words that not infrequently occur in the weekly reports of runs.

The drama of the hunt unfolds scene by scene in the country round; for half the morning, perhaps, the inhabitants of Great Dalby have heard the horn, sometimes faint, sometimes near at hand. Horses and riders have passed along the neighbouring ridges and disappeared again. People have come to the doors of their houses and looked up the street, only to see a stray hound, or a dismounted rider with a lame horse—a stranger to the district—who asks the nearest way to Melton. The old ironstone church looms darkly beneath lowering clouds.

And all the while, somewhere over the green fields above the village, a little brown shape passes swiftly from fence to fence—the hunted fox.

A small group of foot-people stand together on a rise of ground—a farm labourer, a postman whose cycle lies in the hedge, and an old man, half tramp, half shepherd, who might have stepped out of the pages of George Borrow, in a faded black overcoat, between the lapels of which his grey beard is half concealed, his face shaded by a wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his ragged locks of hair. All three gaze intently across the fields.

Someone has truly said that it is the birthright of country people in Leicestershire to holloa when they see a fox; a habit born with them, an instinct inherited through many generations. When they see the fox, they raise their hats in the air and holloa; when they do not see him, they get ready to raise their hats. And sure enough the group on this hill-top, having felt the premonitory tingle in their fingers and itching in their throats, as by a preconcerted signal, together wave their hats aloft and yell with all the power of their lungs.

The fox is far spent, his eye is dull, his back is up; the yell greets him as he breasts the rise, and he turns aside towards the roofs and chimneys of Great Dalby.

Bursting through a hedge at the bottom of the field come the hounds, heads down, sweeping up the slope:

> "They crashed into the blackthorn fence.
> The scent was heavy on their sense,
> So hot, it seemed the living thing,
> It made the blood within them sing;
> Gusts of it made their hackles rise,
> Hot gulps of it were agonies
> Of joy, and thirst for blood and passion." *

The hounds also swing round towards the valley where Great Dalby's smoke rises in a blue film below Crown Hill. The fox has gained the precincts of the village—reckless now, it is his last chance. An empty shed, a barn or byre, even a cottage hearth, these hold a ray of hope. And over the garden walls, through the little orchards, across a farmyard and out among the ricks beyond go the hounds.

The group upon the hill hesitate whether to run in the wake of the hounds or pause to watch the field come over the last fence—they pause a moment, the thunder of the approaching horsemen holds them to the spot.

Master and huntsman and two or three more in the first flight are over the fence, their horses seen extended for a fraction of a second in mid-air,

* John Masefield: "Reynard the Fox."

then landing and getting away, the thorn-twigs quivering behind them. The heavy breathing of their horses mingles with the creaking of saddlery and the ripping of turf, as they pass a few yards from the spectators. Scarcely have they gone, when a line of galloping horses spreads out over the grass. There is a sound like the far-off rattle of quick firing combined with the drag of foam along a shingle beach—a dry crisp rush of sound—as some twenty riders take the fence almost abreast. The leaping horses give to the

IN FULL CRY.

dark line of the hedge the appearance of a wave, rising up and hurtling forward, a wave whose crest sparkles with colour, scarlet and white, like the prismatic glitter of the sun upon a wall of foam. But only for a moment. The horsemen surge forward over the green slope. Others follow singly—the thorn-twigs bend and crack in desultory gusts of sound.

And now the air is charged with the dull impact of hoofs, as the field tailing out in groups of two or three come up the hill. Some horses are going strong, others are flagging; one rider is coated with mud on back and shoulders, and the crown of his hat slopes at a sharp angle towards the brim. They pass with a confused blur of colour, with a spatter of turf-sods and a vibration

of the ground. And to those who stand watching, their passing conveys a sense of force, of elemental power, of something sweeping on to a climax. The climax has been reached—if the whoops and halloas are its chorus—in the village of Great Dalby.

Thither, with all the power of their legs, our three spectators run; the old man panting behind the first two. The postman mounts his bicycle and pedals down the last three hundred yards of road. The villagers are crowding round a cottage garden, where everything is confusion, colour and excitement.

Along every road leading to the hamlet come the followers of the hunt; some hard on the track of the hounds, others turning up as best they can, reaching Great Dalby by any route along which their fortunes have led them, but all look as if they were glad to be there, and as if the village was one of the chosen spots of the earth.

The brush handed to the Master, where the garden palings are broken, and the plants whose buds were waiting for spring lie root upwards in a plot of trampled leaves and earth, is the symbol that draws this crowd together. And those who wonder at so much excitement for apparently so little, should glance at our old friend in the faded coat with his tangled locks of hair. He may not know where he is going to sleep, and his chances of a supper may depend on some happy accident during the day—the timely opening of a gate or holding of a horse—but such benefit as may accrue from his day's sport is now forgotten; he is one of the lucky crowd to see the kill. A crowd that presses round the small garden, and climbs the adjacent walls or fences, making high holiday for this brief hour, and talking of it for days and weeks to come.

After an interval, hounds move off up the village street, the field having gradually collected. Some decide to go home, others change horses, and the roadway slowly clears. The thread of scarlet that marks the hunt may be seen winding its way between the hedges to Ashby Pastures or Thorpe Trussels, for there is time for another gallop before the afternoon light changes to dusk. Evening may find them miles away, with the little drama of Great Dalby already half forgotten.

South of the village, a valley, tending inwards from the Wreake, gradually rises to an important ridge, on which are three coverts, Ashby Pastures, Cream Gorse and Thorpe Trussels. As the ground becomes higher, shallow vales leading to the main valley die out, and the whole unites to form what may be called the Thorpe Satchville *massif*, overlooking the wide Twyford Vale.

A KILL NEAR SOUTH CROXTON

If we ascend the hilly road to Thorpe Satchville from Great Dalby and look eastwards, we can see on the northern slope of Burrough Hill the covert that is neutral to the Quorn and Cottesmore, and note where the Cottesmore boundary encircles Salter's Hill. Southward across the vale is John o' Gaunt, and further still where the range of High Leicestershire meets the eye, Robin-a-Tiptoe, Whadborough Hill and Tilton. Life Hill, close to Lord Morton's Covert, leads the eye along this magnificent skyline to the Coplow itself, standing up amongst the surrounding heights like a great volcano. Just beyond the distant turnpike, five and a half miles away as the crow flies, is the Fernie boundary. It is a striking landscape, containing the remoter parts of the Friday Quorn.

Close to Thorpe Satchville, lying hidden on the south-west ascent from Twyford Vale, is Adam's Gorse—a stirring covert to get away from, where no mistakes must be made and there is no time to lose. Unlike most coverts in the Friday country, it is not easily seen, in spite of its tall oak trees, and comes into view somewhat unexpectedly. At the four cross-ways north of Thorpe Satchville a road to the left runs to Gaddesby, passing Thorpe Trussels just across the railway. Owing partly to its position with regard to Ashby Pastures and Cream Gorse, and also to the hindrance of the railway, this covert is often the origin of many " rings," foxes circling round between the three. It is mostly composed of ash and undergrowth.

Few railways are so inimical to hunting as those in a hill country. The lines of the London and North Eastern run through deep cuttings or on high embankments. Sometimes exuberant moments will carry the boldest spirits of the hunt across them ; but when it is noticed what a fine start there is south-west to Adam's Gorse and Cottesmore domains from Thorpe Trussels it can be well understood how the advent of the railway filled with dismay the hearts of the men of other days, when they saw these remorseless rails being laid across the fairest country in the world.

We now reach the great covert of Ashby Pastures, by the road to Gaddesby. From here Nimrod started his famous fictitious run, which he brought to an end at Whissendine. The wood is mainly of oak and elm trees, tall and close together. In a field near to the junction of the four roads by the wood is the base of a stone cross said to mark the old route from Leicester Abbey to Launde. Local tradition says that it also marks the spot where a duel was fought between Lord Beler and Eustace de Folville, who " met in strife at Ashby Wood or Pasture, at the cross-roads, about mid-way between Ashby Folville and Kirby Belers." In the duel Lord Beler was killed, and Eustace

de Folville only lived long enough to inherit the property the possession of which was the cause of the quarrel.

After passing Carington Spinney, the road to the right leads to Cream Gorse, the third famous covert on the Thorpe Satchville ridge, composed of oak and ash, with thick undergrowth ; and the road to the left leads to Gaddesby village. In 1862 the village was mainly the property of E. H. Cheney, Esq., and the inn is called The Cheney Arms. A member of the family, Lt.-Colonel Cheney, was a Major in the 2nd Dragoons, the Scots Greys, at the time of the Battle of Waterloo, where he had four horses shot under him. He was promoted to Lt.-Colonel on the field. Gott's masterpiece in Gaddesby church illustrates an incident during the battle.

Only a few miles away is another association with a famous cavalry charge. Lord Cardigan's horse " Dandy," which he rode at Balaclava, is buried at Brooksby.

Near the Leicester turnpike is Brooksby Spinney. From the road the ground falls rapidly to the Valley of the Wreake. It is said that a gorse named after Sir Harry Goodricke once covered part of the slope near the Wreake, but it has long ceased to exist.

After passing the villages of Rotherby and Frisby, we are back at our starting point, Kirby Gate. In the next chapter we leave it again for the Twyford Vale.

CHAPTER VIII

FRIDAY COUNTRY (*continued*): TWYFORD VALE AND LOWESBY

". . . No stretch of ground equal to the Twyford Vale of the Quorn."—T. F. DALE.

ABOUT a quarter of a mile north of Burrough-on-the-Hill, once known as Castle Burrough, there is a magnificent view over Quorn country. A few trees rise from behind the last bluff of Burrough Hill, before it drops into the upland vale, which, ever rising, has found its way from the Burton Flats to decline at last into the Twyford Valley. On the far side is the Thorpe Satchville *massif;* and there are the tree-tops of Adam's Gorse lying on the southern slope in its hollow, alone amongst the wide fields—acre upon acre of rolling grassland. Opposite are the scattered gorse bushes of Salter's Hill, and the white road near Gunn's Lodge winding over the ridge. The faint blue haze beyond veils the Monday Quorn.

The slopes bounding this upland valley on the south-west rise to a steep escarpment along which runs the road to Burrough village. It is a high exposed ridge, open to every wintry blast, with a deep drop on either side. The village is dominated by its little thirteenth-century church, but owing to the surrounding trees it is not a conspicuous landmark.

After descending a short way from the crest of the ridge, we come to a halt below the western bastion of Burrough Hill. From this spot no habitation is visible, only an occasional shed or hayrick. The whole landscape lies in the shadow of the great escarpment, which here appears more mountainous than from any other point of view. Descending still further towards John o' Gaunt Station, past a corner of Tilton Lane—that long lonely track to the Cottesmore highlands—there is a fine outlook over the railway towards Thimble Hall, with the Coplow ever insistent on the horizon. Where else in Leicestershire is there an expanse so wide and bleak as the view on the left hand, where the ground rises in one long slope to Tilton? The village is nearly three miles away, a distant group of houses silhouetted on the rugged skyline of the high country. The fields are almost treeless, leading with little break in their monotony to the wind-blown spire of Tilton Church.

Roads here are few and far between, and most of them barred at frequent intervals by gates. Below the station, one of these field tracks goes to John o' Gaunt Covert and Lowesby; another, which we shall follow, runs through the Twyford Vale. A brook of the same name comes down from the Cottesmore uplands and flows through the village of Twyford, eventually joining the Wreake, after having itself been joined by the Queniborough, or South Croxton Brook, as it is variously called. The Friday country is a succession of ridges and valleys, each having its stream, and of these, the brook which flows through Twyford and Ashby Folville is the largest and most important.

Twyford village is in striking contrast to Burrough-on-the-Hill, snug and sheltered by the ramparts of the escarpment behind it. The church with its grey old tower stands among tall trees, protected from the action of storms which have given such a rugged and weather-beaten appearance to others.

The churches of Leicestershire are everywhere landmarks, ornaments to the beautiful countryside, distinctive features of its villages. Whether tall spire or square-cut tower rises prominently from a hill-top—looking down over miles of chequered pasture-land—or stands half-concealed in some hollow of the uplands, it proclaims the village which it dignifies with its presence; individual within the limits of a conformity that separates it at a glance from the spires and towers of other counties, so that all those who love the land that bred them can say, "This village and its church are typical of Leicestershire and nowhere else." Look through the old sporting prints which for more than a century have immortalised the Shires—Leicestershire in particular—and you will see these churches; the artist may have been careless of detail in some respects, but they were never forgotten. A book has been written about the church bells of Leicestershire, but words can never convey that indeterminate wave of sound that of a Sunday evening seems to throb from vale to vale. When the darkness hides them, these belfries come into their own—they join, as it were, a chorus made up of infinite variations, shades of sound mingling in one pulse, as if the whole county came to life and told its memories in peal upon peal to all who care to listen: the churches of the old wapentakes and hundreds vying with one another, now at variance and now in unison, but all contributing in a friendly rivalry. New voices join them—bells that have yet to gain the silver tone of age, and have to ring through many decades before they can add their full quota to this chant of the past.

Some of the oldest inhabitants of Twyford can tell curious stories from

ASHBY PASTURE

their fund of recollections. An old man of eighty-one recounts how he remembers the Marquis of Waterford riding through the village one day past The Plough Inn, an old thatched building, when he noticed the sign depicting a man ploughing with two horses, below which were the words :

" A barrel in the corner
Sprung from a barley-mow,
A place to treat a friend,
So God speed the plough."

Accepting the invitation in a jocular spirit, the Marquis and a friend came back at night, sawed the sign away, pulled it down, and galloped with it to Somerby. The owner went and protested to " Mr. Marquis " as he imagined him to be. He was given ten pounds and a good feast, returning afterwards with the sign.

The story went the round of the village, and anyone who had something which might attract attention and could be removed, lived in hopes of another visit from the Marquis.

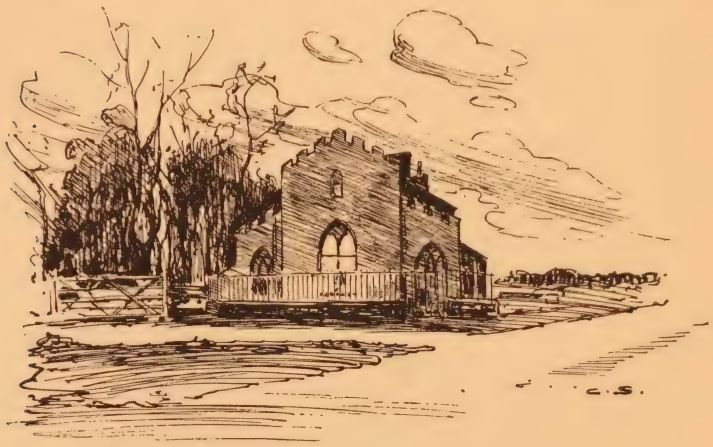
From Twyford we must turn aside, across seven fields south-west of the village, to Thimble Hall.

The name intrigues one, and the building itself does not disappoint the expectations raised. There is probably nothing like it anywhere, and yet it has been denied a place upon the Ordnance Map. This would hardly be strange except that it stands for locality, but it is very curious to find it omitted from the Hunting Map of the Shires, and the omission should be remedied. Thimble Hall is one of those freaks of inspiration—when the creative faculty takes a holiday and produces something in a spirit of caprice —which by their very strangeness endure for centuries ; there have been such freaks in literature, in art, in architecture. None is more quaint than Thimble Hall. It should have been the subject of a poem or novel : " The Romance of Thimble Hall " is a title too good to waste. But romance having passed it by, sport claims it as a convenient and therefore popular meet of hounds.

The building is a hall in miniature, the size of a small cottage, standing close by the road to Lowesby, a thin strip of woodland abutting on its eastern side. Its most ornamental wall, facing a lane that branches off the Lowesby road to Twyford, has the appearance of a castle entrance of pygmy dimensions, with a castellated roof and two windows after the Norman style ; on either side is a castellated wing with a single door. Viewed from a different angle, with this frontage concealed, the little place looks like a keeper's lodge.

It should be first seen from the Twyford lane. Thimble Hall was built in fourteen days, so runs the story, by Sir Frederick Fowke, the grandfather of the present baronet, in honour of the coming of an heir. The celebrations lasted a month; lamps were lit on the road to the "Hall"; bands played; and there was open house and entertainment for everyone in the country round.

The site chosen, besides being far removed from other habitations, is



THIMBLE HALL.

extremely exposed. There are few colder prospects in the Midlands than these wide grass slopes, where one always seems to be in the teeth of the wind. The road by which Thimble Hall stands runs along the centre of the ridge dividing the Twyford Vale from the next valley, through which flows the South Croxton Brook.

Rising to a height of five hundred and thirty feet at the junction of the two roads, the spot is a point of vantage from which—or a little nearer Twyford—can be seen many familiar landmarks not generally visible from the same place. South-east, four miles away, is Owston Wood, and Whadborough's summit (over seven hundred feet), with Orton Park Wood just in sight; north-

east, the little spire of Burrough Church finds its chance at last to be a landmark, unmasked from the trees around it. Looking straight down the road, over the railway and Twyford village, the stately eminence crowned by the woods of Little Dalby Hall is visible on the skyline, where it dips between Burrough and Thorpe Satchville. From no other point of view do these woods contribute so fine a quality to the landscape. To the left of Thorpe Satchville, due north, is the long ridge of Ashby Pastures.

When hounds meet at Thimble Hall under a leaden sky with a gale tearing through the trees; when red coat-tails fly back from white cords, reins slip through numbed fingers, hats have an unruly desire to soar aloft, and the air is full of a drumming empty sound, one could wish that Thimble Hall was larger and afforded more shelter behind its walls. The woods of Baggrave across the valley seem to dance on the horizon, the turbulent gusts of the storm sweep up between the folds of the hills and drive a horse sideways in its gallop—we tack and veer from meet to covert like so many ships in a heavy sea. There is a poor scent, and the fox has choice of two ways only, up wind or down; but when hounds get away at last and we can let ourselves go, there is something added to the joy of the gallop through the maelstrom, even though faces sting under a bombardment of stray leaves blown from the woodland.

Leaving the South Croxton Vale for the moment and turning back towards Twyford, it will be noticed that some of the roadside fields are fenced with wire, and carry red danger signals. These are sometimes sad hindrances to a hunt, and often a man who "vires acquirit eundo"—especially when roads cross his path, and the doubling of roads is no mean amusement—has perforce to seek a gate.

Many of the hedges in this grass country were once protected by ox-rails, and the rows of mortised posts, made of oak and extremely durable, can still be seen. There was a time when the man who made them would mortise post after post with pride, and, the rails once fitted, a fence of this kind could not be trifled with. The "double oxer," constructed to protect the young growers of a newly-laid fence from bullocks, was an obstacle frequently encountered after Meynell's day, and for many decades no man could hope to keep his place with hounds in Leicestershire who was not prepared to ride at one—his horse all out, and his heart, if it was not in the right place, at least sufficiently near it to prevent him turning aside from a leap which could be better described as "forty feet of solid air" than even Mr. Coupland's brook. To the novice these fences were a constant source of dismay,

but a well-seasoned horse would take them in his stride with something to spare for that dreaded last rail. As years passed the " double oxer " became a life's ambition for the hard rider, and, having negotiated it successfully, something to boast about at the end of the day. With the increasing value of time and the expense of labour, an economical substitute was found in wire. The mortised posts remain, strung with the objectionable strands, but in most places the wire is removed in the hunting season.

IN SOUTH CROXTON.

Ashby Folville is the second village of the Vale. In the church are the Folville and Beler tombs already referred to. Although local tradition has accepted a duel as the cause of Lord Beler's death, there are other versions of the affair which describe it as a murder. According to one account, " Eustace de Folville, of Ashby Folville, his two brothers, and Eudo de la Zouch, of Haryngworth, having been threatened by Lord Beler, one of the judges itinerant, and very old, they waylaid and barbarously murdered the judge." Whether duel or murder was the cause of his death, he appears in these old writings as a sombre and tyrannical figure.

Dodsworth gives a fuller version of the story:

"In the year 1326, February 4, Lord Roger de Belere was slain in the county of Leicester. This Roger de Belere (about the beginning of the reign of Edward I) founded a chantry of secular Priests, in the church of St. Peter in Kirkeby-Beler, in the county of Leicester, but after many years the wife of the same Roger (she died 4 Rich. II), with the consent of their son (and successor), Roger de Belere, altered their foundation, and erected a Priory for Chanons regular of the order of St. Austin, taking their first Prior from

LOOKING EAST FROM LORD MORTON'S.

the Abbey of Oweston, in the county of Leicester. This Roger was slain by Eustace de Folville and his brethren, whom he had threatened, in a certain valley near Reresby. He was an oppressor of the Church, and of the neighbouring religious houses, for covetousness of their possessions, which he desired as a gift for his chantry."

The effigy of Lord Beler on the Folville tomb depicts the old judge with a very prominent swollen chest, and a wound under the left breast, where apparently a spear-head has broken off.*

About half a mile from Ashby Folville the road turns to the left and climbs to Barsby. This quaint little hamlet, consisting of a few scattered cottages

* See "Leicestershire and Rutland Notes and Queries," Vol. I.

and farm-houses, with its cobbled pavements and white-washed old inn, might have dropped from a hill country in the north. So alien is its atmosphere, that on a long ride home it induces the sensation of being miles from anywhere, and furthest of all from Melton.

On returning to the Ashby Folville road, the spire of Gaddesby Church proclaims the third village of Twyford Vale. Not only is the church the most elaborate in exterior workmanship of any in Leicestershire, and the most finely proportioned, but, except for that at Bottesford, it is the largest of the village churches. The church is adorned—no other word fills the place—with that purely English variety of spire, the broach spire, of which there are so many examples throughout Leicestershire and Rutland.

Just west of Gaddesby is Dale's Spinney, cut down during the war, but now thick enough to hold a fox. This covert was considerably enlarged by Captain Pennell-Elmhirst. Further on, three-quarters of a mile from the turnpike, is Brooksby Spinney—generally a sure find.

Nearer to the village, in this area of small coverts, are the Gaddesby Spinneys: on one side of the stream the Long Spinney, also known as Cheney's Spinney, and the Square Spinney; and north of the stream and road, Gaddesby Spinney, sometimes called the Privets.

We must now leave the Twyford Vale for Lowesby.

> "Gilmour, leave me here a little, and when John o' Gaunt is drawn,
> If you find the raw material, let Jack Morgan blow his horn.
> 'Tis the place, and all about it, as of old the magpies call,
> Boding evil to "The Lad" and flying over Lowesby Hall.
>
> "Lowesby Hall, that in the distance overlooks the grassy plain,
> Swamp'd from Twyford to the Coplow by the everlasting rain.
> Many a day from yonder spinney, in November moist and chill,
> Have I seen the wily Reynard steal sedately up the hill."

Thus opens the spirited parody on "Locksley Hall," written by Bromley Davenport; a parody which, unfortunately, does not fulfil the promise of the first stanzas, and is too long to quote in full. "The Lad" was the nickname of Colonel the Hon. Henry Forester. The poem would have had greater historical interest if it had not been entirely confined in its later verses to the exploits of a youthful Nimrod who was always getting into pecuniary difficulties which considerably damped his ardour for the chase.

Lowesby lies beneath High Leicestershire—according to the older usage of the term, which was confined to the high country now hunted by the Fernie and the Cottesmore in the area between Market Harborough and Tilton—and from the park can be seen Lord Morton's Covert, which marks Life Hill, one of the loftiest points in Leicestershire outside Charnwood Forest.

A SILHOUETTE NEAR LORD MORTON'S.

To-day the term " High Leicestershire " is often used to describe " The Top Country," a designation once applied only to the Friday Quorn, but now, as popularly understood, covering a much wider area which has been clearly defined by Major Burnaby in the Introduction to this book.

Lowesby Park slopes down to the South Croxton Brook, on which lie

Baggrave (the stately lines of its woods can be seen looking north-west down the vale), South Croxton and Queniborough. West and south-west the country rises to Cold Newton, Quenby Hall and the Coplow. Among the rolling hills and wide grass slopes of Lowesby's domain, with groups of trees set here and there, the fine old Georgian house is completely shut off from the world. The drive twists and turns before the house comes into view; its warm-toned brick walls, so delicate in their mouldings, with their west and east sides marked in pleasant variety with blue "headers," form a harmonious whole wrought by an artist's hand, and brought to perfection with the passing years. The hipped roofs with their fine old slates, the plain chimneys, and the Georgian windows have an austere simplicity. The picture is completed by the long walk, the wall of outbuildings, the flower-garden, and at the end the old ironstone church, round which is grouped the secluded village. The place lives in a world of its own—a world of memories.

Under windy skies, or the pale blue of autumn mornings, sportsmen of the old days gathered at Lowesby Hall. There was no wire then, and railways had not scarred the Quorn uplands—everywhere, only the wide fields with their soft browns and greys, the gold of the autumn leaves and the scarlet berries of the woods and hedges. But though the country round has seen many changes, when hounds meet under the tall trees at Lowesby even the shining cars cannot disturb the old-world atmosphere that hangs about them.

From Lowesby, it is just over a mile to Lord Morton's Covert on an escarpment which here rises to a height of seven hundred feet; but before ascending the hill, we must mention one historic anecdote: the jumping of a gate by the Marquis of Waterford in Lowesby Hall. The hoof-prints of his horse on the dining-room floor are still visible, and the gate used to hang above the fireplace, as a memento of the bet which occasioned his leap. The gate has since been removed to the stables at Lowesby, where it can be seen to-day.

Lord Morton's Covert—consisting mainly of ash, larch, and oak—overhangs the valley. The lower end of the covert is a dense thicket of thorns. On the way to Tilton, a road drops steeply past the wood to Sludge Hall in colloquial parlance, more happily called Hill House on the map. On the western side of the descent are sandy declivities covered with furze and haunted by rabbits. Many a run over the high ground to Tilton has started from Lord Morton's; there is no finer sight in Leicestershire than a break away in this direction. As the fox leaves the covert and descends the precipitous escarpment, and hounds crash through the boundary fence, the field negotiate a hedge on the crest and pour down the slope nearer the road. It

is an exhilarating gallop across the narrow valley and up the opposite hill, but before Tilton is reached many stiff fences bar the way. There goes a riderless horse, here is an obstinate refuser, turning again and again from an ugly line of rails. One way and another, the meadows are dotted with stragglers. The fox frequently takes a line past Tilton to John o' Gaunt Covert, over the railway and round by Marefield, crossing the railway again and back

BAGGRAVE.

to the South Croxton Vale and Baggrave. This is a country which tries the best horse, and a man who can live with hounds when the fox runs in a ring from Lord Morton's can go anywhere, and may consider himself qualified to ride over Leicestershire at its stiffest.

The rough fields between Lord Morton's and John o' Gaunt, opposite Cold Newton, which contain some scattered gorse covert, are neutral to the Quorn and Cottesmore.

Past this neutral ground runs the road that descends from Tilton village

to Lowesby, and finally runs on to Queniborough. From half-way up the hill there is a good view of John o' Gaunt Covert, four fields away at the bottom of a long steep slope, close by the railway. Beyond is the ridge which hides Marefield. The covert is mainly of oak and ash, with thick undergrowth. In places it has been partially cleared, leaving the trees in serried lines, with new growth springing up between.

At Lowesby is Sir Frederick Fowke's New Covert, planted just after the South African War, and on the left of the road from Lowesby to Thimble Hall is Carr Bridge Covert.

The Prince of Wales's Covert in Baggrave Park, opposite Baggrave Hall, the residence of Major Burnaby, is one of the strongholds for foxes in the Friday country. The undergrowth in the covert is "cut-and-laid," affording a secure retreat from marauding sheep-dogs. In the centre, at the junction of the four rides, is an oak tree planted by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII.) in 1871. Before this date the covert was called Oak Dene. The late General G. S. Burnaby, M.P. for the Melton Division up to his death, asked the Prince of Wales to sow his initials in gorse seed and plant the tree on an occasion when hounds met at Baggrave. The gorse that was subsequently sown on two of the four squares (divided by the rides) that form the covert was killed during a very hard winter in the 'eighties, and Major Burnaby afterwards planted the privet and blackthorn which now grow there. After leaving Baggrave, the next village is South Croxton, famous for its brook, which runs through open fields, unfenced —a tempting though deceptive and often disastrous leap. The stream is very deep, and its clay banks in places precipitous. But when it is in flood with the banks concealed the take-off is most treacherous, and as many as six horses have disappeared momentarily in its depths in the space of a few minutes. On more than one occasion their riders have asserted that they "never touched bottom." South Croxton village, like Barsby, has a note of the Wolds about it.

Barkby Holt, one of the great names of Leicestershire, is a mile away, on the high ground above the stream. The name is not so famous, however, as to prevent some would-be sportsmen in Leicestershire from being caught napping about it. Hence the man who had boasted of his knowledge of the Shires, on being asked if he had seen Barkby Holt, replied that he had "dined with him often"!

The covert is set in a wild country, having all the features of the Wolds. It is not approached by any roads, only bridle tracks, one of which runs through the great wood. Three hundred yards away is an old ironstone

BARKBY HOLT

quarry. Stunted thorn trees are dotted along the track over down-like country descending to Beeby in the next vale, through which runs the Keyham Brook.

Looking south-east from the Holt, the Prince of Wales's Covert can be seen on the slopes of Baggrave Park, and north-west beyond Ridgemere Lane is the spire of Queniborough Church.

As recently as 1899 many of the fields along the Queniborough road were still unfenced. At the four cross-ways between Barsby and South Croxton the road dips, and the ridge is split into two spurs, which gradually die away as they approach the Wreake. One of these spurs occasions a difficult bit of jumping, when hounds are running south-west towards the Prince of Wales's Covert. Past the windmill above Barsby there is a sharp drop and a fence into the road, followed immediately by a second fence. The take-off for this is on a steep slant downhill, and when going fast it is a difficult obstacle to clear. A curious fall took place here some years ago—more reminiscent of hunting on Exmoor than Leicestershire. The pace was great, and the horse —a seasoned hunter—unable to check itself, after flying the second fence, was seen to plunge headlong into the marshy ground which lies like a trap below.

Queniborough Spinney is another which was cut down during the war, but is now growing up. After this covert the ground slopes towards the village, and the flat meadows beyond the turnpike where the Wreake joins the Soar.

We now reach the third vale, through which runs the stream known nearer its source as the Keyham Brook; on its banks are the villages of Barkby and Beeby. Returning by the bridle-road south of the former, we follow the high ground to Barkby Thorpe Spinney. A mile further on the fields slope down to another small stream. A road here passes through several gates, and close to its passage over the stream is the site of the lost town of Hamilton—a town or large village which has completely disappeared, leaving no trace, over whose site the grass grows as if nothing had ever disturbed it. Tradition says that the great Scottish family took its name from this, the mysterious place of their origin.

From Hamilton the ground rises to Scraptoft, on a penultimate ridge, which merges south of Ingarsby into the final crest along which runs the

turnpike. The lane leading to Scraptoft is shaded by elms, through whose branches the spires and tall chimneys of Leicester are visible; in haze and smoke lies the great city, less than four miles away. But the heights lead on past Scraptoft Hall and Church to the spinneys, clear-cut along the sky-line, and Leicester fades into the haze with increasing distance. The old

THE PRINCE OF WALES'S COVERT

The oak tree on the right was planted in 1871 by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII.).

church stands on high ground buttressed by a wall of ancient brickwork, above the sunken road, its low square tower set among the dark trees. Close by is the beautiful old Queen Anne house, surrounded by high brick walls with entrance gates of wrought iron, disclosing the flower borders within.

Below the Scraptoft heights is the brook that flows past Hamilton, and beyond, rising from the valley to four hundred feet, is the village of Keyham. The houses slope down to the vale on the west, and the lanes ascending to

the Keyham ridge are precipitous. On the far side of the ridge is the Keyham Brook, running down to Beeby, and across the Hungerton road is Hungerton Fox-Holes, a quiet covert beside the upper reaches of the stream.

From Keyham to Hungerton is another ascent, affording a glimpse of Beeby Church, surrounded by its fine yew trees, and noticeable because of its unfinished spire—commenced and then abandoned (so the story goes) because of a quarrel between the two brothers who were its builders. Once in Hungerton, there is again a short ascent to Quenby Hall.

A field road passes through white gates to Quenby, the great elms forming an avenue along the wide expanse of the ascending park. A sunk wall of brick surrounds the lawn in front of the house, shaded by a group of cedars. The height of the plateau on whose slopes the old Elizabethan mansion stands —from the summit it is possible to see the Peak of Derbyshire—the moaning of the wind and occasional " clang " of a carrion crow from the trees in the park, give a note of aloofness and grimness to Quenby Hall.

Perhaps this sombre note is also enhanced by the dark shadow that here dominates the landscape ; no longer seen from afar, but brooding, imminent, almost overpowering in its proud isolation ; looking down over Quenby's elms and cedars, over the valleys with their streams, and ridge receding beyond ridge, away across half a county to the Derbyshire hills—the shadow of Billesdon Coplow.

CHAPTER IX

BILLESDON COPLOW

"Hark! hark to the notes of the melodious French horn,
How sweetly she calls you out in the morn.
She tells you Jemme is mounted on Tartar his steed,
And invites you all to the cover with speed.
Of all pleasures or pastimes ever heard or seen,
There's none in the world like to merry hunting."

"The enclosed curious manuscript was called by its author a *Hunting Song*."—PETER BECKFORD.

BILLESDON COPLOW—was ever place more happily named or name more suited to a place! The very words call up associations peculiar to the wooded hill, pre-eminent among all the hills of Leicestershire, not because of its height (for there are many which surpass it), but because of its perfect staging for the part it plays in the drama of the hunting-field. The Coplow "gets across the boards," and stands upon the stage without a rival, and with all the county which it adorns at its feet. The associations inseparable from its name give to hunting in Leicestershire the qualities of a great play—a dignity which nothing can take away, a vigour which permeates the drama from start to finish; associations that will endure from the rising of the curtain till its fall, their echoes sounding through all time. The setting is superb: the blue distance of the Midlands spread for miles to every point of the compass; the foothills that climb to the Coplow's final height; Quenby's sombre groves; the Scraptoft Spinneys looking down on Leicester; and the trees of Botany Bay.

Above them all the Coplow proclaims itself, with clouds rolling above its wooded crest and the wind sighing through the larches, with the winding of a horn and the chorus of hounds—the inspiration of old writers who have celebrated it in prose or verse.

These old writers, who by their native wit have made a worthy contribution to the art they practise, were often worried by a criticism levelled against them—that followers of the sport of hunting were illiterate. They sought

to combat this aspersion by a frequent reference to the classics in their text. Illiterate! But one has boasted that he could hunt a fox in Latin, a hare in Greek, and, perhaps, the lesser vermin in some long-dead language, leaving a record of his exploits on cuneiform engraved upon Mountsorrel granite or on Swithland slates! In order to enforce their claim to be considered scholars as well as sportsmen, they rarely wrote a page without some reference to Ulysses, or any hero, god, or goddess that memories of their school days brought to mind. This idiosyncrasy gives a curious flavour to the earliest books on hunting. These authors are eloquent enough when they hunt and kill their fox, but it is a little difficult to understand why we should be reminded of the walls of Troy—did Helen ride side-saddle or astride?—or why the huntsman calling off his hounds should find himself enthroned with heroes of whom he never heard—standing beside Ulysses, or battling with the waves aboard his trireme under the watchful eye of Polyphemus.

Good old Peter Beckford seems to feel a slight discrepancy between the steel engraving which he chose as a frontispiece for his book (a group of most unpleasant-looking ladies with a tame serpent, a pair of mongrels, and a long barbed spear) and the subject of his "Thoughts." "You will rally me, perhaps," he writes, "on the choice of my frontispiece; but why should not hunting admit the patronage of a lady? The ancients, you know, invoked Diana at setting out on the chase, and sacrificed to her at their return. Is not this enough to show the propriety of my choice? At all events, I assure myself, you will approve her attendants—*Health* and *Contentment*."

Diana, of course, gives entry to the charmed circle, and it is tacitly assumed that a pack of hounds was kept for the entertainment of all and sundry who gathered upon Olympus.

Billesdon Coplow might at least claim, without undue presumption, to be an earthly site for the Temple of Jupiter. The tall grove of beeches whose leaves are swept from beneath them by the passing winds, the columnar larches that seem to uphold the roof of some aerial edifice poised upon their crests, the rusty foliage of the oaks appearing like a façade encircling the central dome, or terraces climbing tier upon tier towards the sky—these might tempt our "illiterate" sportsmen to picture Diana running through shaded avenues with her hounds, attended by those noble personages whose names they used so freely, and sped on her way by no earthly music, but a chorus of horns and trumpets, with perhaps a peal of thunder, conducted among the clouds by Jupiter himself.

The writer and sportsman who has linked his name with Billesdon Coplow

for as long as its rides echo to the sound of a horn is the Rev. Robert Lowth, the author of the poem which he dedicated to "The Fox-Hunters of the United Kingdom."

This poem has been printed in full in many hunting anthologies, but only a few readers of sporting literature have read it in the original pamphlet

BILLESDON COPLOW, FROM THE ROAD TO TILTON.

published in 1830. The footnotes, and memoir of Robert Lowth which precedes the poem, are full of interesting touches (some paragraphs concerning Hugo Meynell have already been quoted).

The poem itself reads as freshly to-day as on the evening when it was written, a few days after the run it describes.

"It was on a visit to Melton, when Mr. Meynell hunted the Quorn country, that Mr. Lowth was an eye-witness of the celebrated run from Billesdon

Coplow. Some of the party, who, perhaps, saw the *least* of that run, had published a very garbled account of the affair. At the request of a friend (the Hon. G. Germaine) he sat down one evening to pen and ink, and the next morning the true version of the affair appeared in verse." Thus runs the memoir.

Now a man who, after taking part in this record run mounted on a raw horse, and sustaining therein at least one " rattling fall," could sit down to

LARCHES ON THE COPLOW.

pen and ink and write a poem which is still the best of its kind after a century and a quarter was no ordinary parson. The Rev. Robert Lowth had ridden against Lord Sackville and his brother, George Germain, in the first Welter Stakes at Bibury Races in his Christ Church days, and had later won several steeplechases, including the Hunt Cup at Winchester, long before he ever came to Melton. The names of some of the horses in his stable were quite famous in their day—he rode " Gohanna " at Winchester, and won the Farmers' Cup during the Hambleden Hunt races on a " clever little bay horse " called " Harlequin." Most of these exploits he had already recorded in verse before he wrote " Billesdon Coplow."

Of Robert Lowth at his home near Winchester we have an attractive picture in the following :

" An instance of how little he valued trouble or inconvenience where he could oblige others," says a writer in the *Sporting Magazine*, " occurred during my being snowed up at his house for the Christmas vacation. We were sitting round the fire after dinner, when one of his daughters observed it was the Winchester ball night, and what a pleasant thing it would be if some Genii could transport us all that night to the ball by magic. To our astonishment, and in spite of all opposition, the coach and four horses were brought to the door. When he had made his daughters put on their ball dresses, and notwithstanding a fearful cold night, and heavy snow on the ground, he drove us to Winchester, twelve miles, and back again when the ball was over. Few modern coachmen would ever dream of such a thing." And we might add, few modern parsons would have a coach and four handy for such emergencies !

The author of " Billesdon Coplow " died in 1822, as the result of a chill caught while he was chasing two youths who were robbing his plum trees in the early hours of the morning, clad as he was in little but his night attire.

His two antagonists at Bibury (at the time of his death, the Duke of Dorset and Lord Oxford) were with him at the last.

With the shade of Robert Lowth there come those whom he immortalised : Mr. Forester on " Tell Tale," Mr. Maddocks on " Beaufremont," Lord Villiers on the impetuous " Shuttlecock," and many more ; while foremost of all, though now advanced in years, is the Master, a dignified and stately shade. Hugo Meynell is only mentioned at the end of the poem * (perhaps its author did not like to trifle with so great a name), but his son, Charles, has several lines to himself. Mounted on his horse " Waggoner," he comes in for some mild chaff :

> " Yet prithee, dear Charles ! why rash vows will you make,
> Your leave of old Billesdon to finally take ?
> Since from Seg's Hill, for instance, or perhaps Melton Spinney,
> If they go a good pace, you are beat for a guinea ! "

A footnote to the original copy explains the first two lines : " He had

* The last verse is quoted before Chapter III, Part I. Some authorities (including Mr. W. C. A. Blew, " The Quorn Hunt and its Masters ") state that Hugo Meynell was not present during the Coplow run, his son (Godfrey ?) acting as Master, and meeting his death the same year through a fall from his horse. Godfrey Meynell, who died in 1800, is not mentioned in the poem. Charles, who subsequently became Master of the Royal Tennis Court, was the only one of Mr. Meynell's three sons who survived him, Hugo dying in 1780.

ROUGH FENCES NEAR BILLESDON

threatened never again to attempt following the hounds from Billesdon, as no horse could carry his weight up to them in that part of the country."

Charles was thirty-two at the time of the great run on February 24th, 1800; and it was on account of the illness of his eldest son, Godfrey, who died on May 17th of the same year, that Meynell gave up the Mastership of the Quorn and sold Quorndon Hall.

One remarkable point about the Coplow poem is that its tone throughout expresses the greatest good-nature. There is not a hint of that carping which occurs at the end of the ballad printed on page 165 of this book (though it must be conceded here that the gentlemen in these verses had done themselves rather well and were perhaps unduly elated), or which gives so bitter, and alas, so human a note, to the following lines from Mr. Osborne's poem, "A Day with Lord Southampton's Hounds":

"'The backward crowd are still the first to chide,
For all can censure where but few can ride.
Let those blame others who themselves excel,
And pass their judgment who have ridden well.
Each timid skirter thinks it is his right
To hurt your feelings and display his spite.
If blest with iron nerves, 'You ride for fame,
And seek in hunting nothing but a name';
If tender of your person in the chase,
'You love the hounds, but still refuse to race.'

"'Look at him now!' On all sides it is said,
'I always knew it, damn him, he's afraid!'
These blame the system, master, hounds and all,
And swear the huntsman does not like a fall.
Not prone to cavil or to take offence,
Some in good-nature pardon want of sense,
And think a smiling and well-meaning face
Can Ewart stop, or Willis, when they race.
On t'other tack some err, and make their boast,
Hounds run the hardest when they're damned the most."

Truly, the god of Billesdon Coplow, be he Jupiter or any other deity apostrophised in prose or verse, is a jolly fellow, and he never found a mortal to inspire with his genial spirit more responsive than Robert Lowth, or one who showed it more consistently in the hunting-field than Hugo Meynell himself.

In the first few lines of his epic the author of "Billesdon Coplow" dismisses all those who are likely to mar the pleasant humour of his verse (and a good many who meant well, but were victims of mischance) to where all the carpers and grousers of this world should go—oblivion. And having

cleared the way for true sportsmen, he leads them such a dance as even the Coplow has never shown to its votaries again. After recalling the first page of his stirring lines we must leave him :

"With the wind at north-east, forbiddingly keen,
The Coplow of Billesdon ne'er witnessed, I ween,
Two hundred such horses and men at a burst,
All determined to ride, each resolv'd to be first.
But to get a good start, over-eager and jealous,
Two-thirds, at the least, of these very fine fellows,
So crowded, and hustled, and jostled, and cross'd,
That they rode the wrong way, and at starting were lost.
In spite of th' unpromising state of the weather,
Away broke the fox, and the hounds close together :
A burst up to Tilton so brilliantly ran
Was scarce ever seen in the mem'ry of man.
What hounds guided scent, or which led the way,
Your bard—to their names quite a stranger—can't say;
Tho' their names had he known, he is free to confess,
His horse could not show him at such a death-pace.
Villiers, Cholmondley, and Forester made such sharp play,
Not omitting Germaine, never seen till to-day :
Had you judg'd of these four by the trim of their pace,
At Bib'ry you'd thought they'd been riding a race.
But these hounds with a scent—how they dash and they fling—
To o'er-ride them is quite the impossible thing !
Disdaining to hang in the wood, thro' he raced,
And the open for Skeffington gallantly faced,
Where headed, and foil'd, his first point he forsook,
And merrily led them a dance o'er the brook.
Pass'd Galby and Norton, Great Stretton and Small,
Right onward still sweeping to old Stretton Hall :
Where two minutes' check served to shew, at one ken,
The extent of the havoc 'mongst horses and men.
Such sighing, such sobbing, such trotting, such walking—
Such reeling, such halting, of fences such baulking—
Such a smoke in the gaps, such comparing of notes—
Such quizzing each other's daub'd breeches and coats :
Here a man walked afoot, who his horse had half kill'd,
There you met with a steed who his rider had spill'd :
In short, such dilemmas, such scrapes, such distress,
One fox ne'er occasioned, the knowing confess."

CHAPTER X

THE DONINGTON COUNTRY : AND CONCLUSION

" Making every allowance for the temerity of youth, and with a strong fellow-feeling for keenness, if I might be allowed to make a suggestion, it would be that before a young man commences to hunt in Leicestershire, he would do well to disport himself for a season or two in a more provincial county, under a good huntsman, with the object of learning some of the rudiments of fox-hunting, and riding to hounds. ' Experientia docet,' as they taught us at Harrow, and I feel sure that a candidate for honours over the broad pastures and big fences of High Leicestershire, fresh from a ' tour in the provinces,' such as I have ventured to prescribe, will be the first to admit its efficacy when he faces the music in earnest."—JOHN MAUNSELL RICHARDSON.

THE Quorn Saturday country lies north of the Loughborough-Ashby road, and, roughly speaking, west of a line running from Loughborough to Plumtree (this boundary has been given in detail in Chapter III). The greater portion of this area was known as the Donington country, and was separated from Quorn territory about 1833, when it was hunted by the Marquis of Hastings. In 1851, four years after Sir Richard Sutton became Master of the Quorn, the original boundary was restored, and the fine wooded country round Breedon and Castle Donington has been an integral part of the Hunt ever since.

We can here pick up the threads of Quorn history at the point where we left it in Chapter V, when the Hunt was restored to its title and former territory. It has already been stated that changes of Mastership followed all too rapidly on the death of Sir Richard Sutton. Cecil, in his " Records of the Chase," thus describes the events immediately following the year 1855 :

" No Master of Hounds ever displayed the glories of Leicestershire more brilliantly than Sir Richard, whose experience in all matters connected with the ' noble science ' was truly orthodox, and Tom Day, his huntsman, carried out his instructions most indefatigably. Foxes were scrupulously preserved and numerous ; therefore, finding that from Quorn he could not do that justice to the good cause which it was at all times his ambition, his pleasure, and his determination to carry out, he appropriated a part of the country to

Mr. Richard Sutton, who was then residing at Skeffington, where kennels were constructed and hounds supplied. Mr. Sutton with great skill handled his own pack, having Ben Boothroyd as first whip and kennel huntsman. A sad reverse to all these happy scenes occurred in November 1855, in consequence of the lamented death of Sir Richard Sutton, aged fifty-seven. The regret universally expressed bespoke the esteem and popularity the baronet had gained. In order to repair in some degree his loss, Mr. Richard Sutton continued to hunt the eastern portion of the country till the termination of the season, and Mr. Frank Sutton, with a scratch pack, performed similar duties north of the Wreake, occupying the kennels at Quorn, and the respective packs had many brilliant runs. Sir Richard Sutton's hounds were sold by Messrs. Tattersall, at Hyde Park Corner, about a month after their owner's decease, when seventy couples produced 1821 guineas. . . . Mr. Richard Sutton's hounds were similarly disposed of the following April at Quorn, when thirty-nine couples and a half realised 1490 guineas, an infinitely higher average than his father's ; * but the time of the year in some measure accounts for that, and the candidates for their services were the Duke of Cleveland, Lord Stamford, Lord Henry Bentinck, and Sir Watkin Wynn. Lord Stamford then undertook to hunt the country, and in addition to the hounds purchased at the two sales already named,† were Mr. Millbank's and Mr. Hellier's packs, besides a good draught from Mr. Anstruther Thomson. With such a profusion of excellent materials, Lord Stamford was in possession of a wonderfully good lot of hounds. . . ."

When Lord Stamford became Master, the portion of the country hunted by Mr. Richard Sutton was undertaken by Mr. Tailby, in connection with a part of the Cottesmore, with certain conditions which brought about a crisis in 1871, both Lord Lonsdale and Mr. Coupland claiming parts of Mr. Tailby's country for their respective Hunts.‡

Lord Stamford hunted the Quorn for seven seasons, afterwards selling his pack to Mr. Clowes, who hunted the country for three years.

Mr. Clowes was succeeded by Mr. Musters, who was followed in 1871 by Mr. John Coupland (hunting the same hounds), with the arrangement that Mr. Musters should hunt the Charnwood country two days a week. This arrangement did not last long, and Mr. Coupland was faced with the necessity of raising an entirely fresh pack of hounds, the former Master having

* They included some of his father's hounds, purchased at the previous sale.
† Lord Stamford's name is included in a long list of purchasers of Sir Richard's hounds.
‡ See page 171.

finally left the country with his pack. A selection of hounds from the Craven was not at first successful, and it remained for Tom Firr, who came from the North Warwickshire as huntsman to the Quorn in 1872, to overcome the difficulties of hunting with a pack unsuited to the country. How he overcame them by judicious breeding and kennel management is evidenced by the wonderful success of his long service with the Quorn.

Before concluding with the last pages of Quorn history, we will make a brief tour of the Donington country—so called after Castle Donington, the village in the extreme northern portion of Leicestershire (Donitone of Doomsday) that owes the prefix to its present name to the remains of a mediæval castle. Once the property of the mother of Earl Morcar, little trace is left of the castle to-day. It stood upon a sandstone hill overlooking the valley of the Trent. The mound of the keep is now covered with small holdings, miniature orchards invade the fosse, and buildings have encroached upon the counterscarp—Castle Donington is such only in name.

Donington Hall, the ancient seat of the Marquis of Hastings, is a mile and a half from the village, on the bank of the Trent close to the boundary of the Meynell Hunt. Extensive woods surround the park, Coppice Wood adjoining it and continuing as far as the main road. Three miles east of the park are the small coverts round Lockington. Here we come to low ground on either side of the river Soar, where it flows into the Trent; and beyond the Soar is Kingston Hall, the seat of Lord Belper. Further east, near to the Midland Railway, are Crownend Wood, West Leake Hills, and smaller coverts.

The pick of the Saturday country lies west of the railway; east of it is the marshy ground of Bunny Moor, wherein is a once famous duck decoy. Gotham Moor and the valley of the Fairham Brook are further north, with a few small coverts near the banks of the Trent. The Decoy, Bunny Park, and Bunny Old and New Woods all hold foxes; but perhaps the most notable covert in the district, certainly the most striking, is Rancliffe Wood, at the cross-ways where the road running by the wall of Bunny Park joins that from Keyworth to Bradmore. A fourth road leads back to Bunny village and the turnpike from Loughborough to Nottingham.

Rancliffe Wood rises abruptly from flat cultivated fields, climbing the slopes of a dome-shaped hill. The Wolds of the Monday country continue to Keyworth, and the wood covers a last spur of the high ground where it falls away to the Fairham Vale.

Following the turnpike to Loughborough through Costock, the next

village is Rempstone. The woods and plantations of Stanford Park are west of the village, with innumerable small coverts on both sides of the road to Ashby. South of Kings Brook is Hoton New Covert, close to the Monday boundary. Then turning west past Black-a-Moors Spinney, crossing the Soar and the Loughborough Canal, and passing the Deer Park on the outskirts of the town, we reach the industrial village of Shepshed. A mile north of this are two famous coverts running down to the banks of Black Brook—Oakley Wood and Piper Wood.

Oakley Wood is a mile in length, and Piper Wood little short of it. They are placed in a rideable country—a district of fairly small fields with thorn fences, and narrow lanes leading to the many farms which are here scattered about the country-side. This part of Leicestershire is essentially rural, sandwiched between the two main-line railways on the east, and a branch of the Midland railway on the west. It maintains its rural character in spite of the proximity of Shepshed and another branch railway to the south and the coal district which threatens to envelop it further west. The pleasant village of Belton by the Grace Dieu Brook is two miles from these woods, leading to a further group of fox coverts—Breedon Clouds, and Pasture and Asplin Woods.

North of Breedon Clouds is the most picturesque of all the Saturday country villages, Breedon-on-the-Hill. Its church is on the summit of a lofty limestone rock, once the site of an ancient fortress of great natural strength. The ramparts of this fortress, known as the Bulwarks, still encircle the hill. On the south side the fortifications have been destroyed by quarries; the village is at the foot of these quarries, the houses lining the Ashby road and climbing part of the way up the lower slopes of the hill, with the immense escarpment of the limestone towering above them. Castle Donington is four miles to the north-east of Breedon, Melbourne and the Meynell country two miles to the north-west.

A small part of Quorn territory here leaves Leicestershire, a salient of Derbyshire extending east to within a mile of Breedon and thence running up to the western end of Donington Park. This salient includes Melbourne and Kings Newton in Quorn country. Round Melbourne the landscape is thickly wooded, the road southward past the Coppice looking down from the ridge along which it runs upon a continuous succession of woodlands, and away over the valley to Calke Abbey. Close by Spring Wood the road leaves Derbyshire, and continuing along the ridge, passes Staunton Hall. The prospect remains the same, the size and depth of the woods

IN THE WOODS NEAR COLEORTON

gradually increasing, piling up beyond Staunton to the distant crest of South Wood, after which they end near the confines of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. The road turns to the left, to Worthington and Newbold, and then bears right to Ashby, between Lount Wood and the extensive Outwoods and Rough Park. Turning sharp left within a mile of Ashby, we reach Coleorton Hall, on the borders of the coal country. There are several pits in the parish of Coleorton—originally Coal-Orton—but the scattered village is half a mile from the Hall, which stands back among its trees, flanked by the Outwoods.

Coleorton Hall, now the residence of Sir George Beaumont, has many reminiscences of the poet Wordsworth, who frequently stayed there. Lines from some of his sonnets are engraved on tablets in the grounds.

From Coleorton the turnpike leads back to Loughborough and Quorn. Having arrived once more at the famous village, the survey of the whole of Quorn territory being now complete, a conclusion must be made with a brief summary of the later history of the Hunt.

Mr. John Coupland remained Master of the Quorn for thirteen years, being succeeded in 1884 by Lord Manners. Mr. Coupland has been described as a " real good sportsman," and there was probably a better average of first-class runs during his Mastership than had been seen before.

After two seasons, Lord Manners was succeeded by Captain Warner and Mr. W. B. Paget as joint Masters; their long reign ended in 1893. They were followed by Lord Lonsdale, with the arrangement that his brother, Mr. Lancelot Lowther, should act for him in his absence. The brilliant period of Lord Lonsdale's Mastership ended in 1898, the same year that Tom Firr was obliged to sever his long connection with the Quorn.

Captain (now Colonel) Burns-Hartopp took over the Hunt at a difficult time, and, in Mr. Paget's words, " no man ever worked harder for a hunt or had more misfortune to contend with than this new Master." In spite of these difficulties, the sport shown was on the whole extraordinarily good, and it was a matter for general regret when Captain Burns-Hartopp resigned in 1905. Captain Forester succeeding, maintained the same standard of excellence until the War. This period was remarkable for the many fine riders to hounds, whose names have become household words with the Quorn. In this connection it is interesting to recall two paragraphs from an article on Fox-Hunting by Mr. John Maunsell Richardson, which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1909:

" I don't think I am alone in the opinion that never in the history of fox-hunting were there so many or better riders of either sex than those hunting

at the present time with the Quorn, Belvoir, Pytchley, Cottesmore, and Mr. Fernie's hounds. Never, either, were there more beautifully bred horses than are to be seen out nowadays with the packs just mentioned. Of their riders amongst the old stagers, where would you find better than Lords Lonsdale, Annaly, and Cowley, General Codrington, General Burn-Murdoch, Colonel 'Willy' Lawson, Colonel Brocklehurst (Queen's Equerry), Majors Ricardo, McKie, Hughes Onslow, and Laycock, Captains Forester, Douglas Pennant, and Hubbersty, Parson Seabrook, Messrs. Cecil Grenfell, H. T. Barclay, H. Sheriffe, Hollway Steeds, Foxhall Keene, Algy Burnaby, and R. and Guy Fenwick? Whilst names to conjure with amongst later arrivals in the country are those of Lord Dalmeny, Sir John Milbanke, Sir Frederick Fowke, Sir Charles Lowther, Captain Paynter (winner of last year's Grand Military), Captain Long (son of the Right Hon. Walter Long), and Messrs. Chandos de Paravicini, T. C. Chichester, Greville Clayton and George Drummond.

"As usual, there was plenty of fun the day after the Cottesmore Hunt Ball, some of the young brigade riding one against the other in a way quite refreshing to behold. 'Ware wire!' shouted Gilson, as his quick eye spotted the enemy running along the top of the biggish fence he was making for, branching off as he spoke for a place lower down. Not so Lord Dalmeny, galloping along in his wake, and apparently in the same heroic frame of mind as General Bombastes when he sang:

'I go, I go—
All dangers scorning,
Some death I'll di-i-ie
Before the morning!'

for, neither swerving to right nor left, he took the fence, wire and all, just as it came, without touching a twig. Nor was this his lordship's only adventure. In the course of the gallop the Manton Brook came in his way, and his horse, a big grey, refusing, shot Lord Dalmeny clean over his head on to the opposite bank, with the result that the latter had to wade through the brook to rejoin the enterpriseless animal in question."

Captain Forester resigned in 1918, and after a brief period Major Burnaby and Mr. W. E. Paget became joint Masters.

At the time of his resignation, May 1st, 1918, Captain Forester, having carried on through four years of the War, was begged to stay on till the end and gain the kudos of having done so—of course at that time no one knew whether the War would end or go on for ever! Captain Forester, however,

CHARMER

WHIMSEY

BAINFUL

REDWING

said that he was unable to continue, so the Committee took the hounds on and asked a small committee, with Major Burnaby at its head, to run them.

There was one boy left in the kennels and it was necessary to get a huntsman. The age limit for conscription had just been raised to fifty. Walter Wilson was selected out of thirty-two applicants, even at that time, for the post of huntsman. There was also a whipper-in, who had to work on the land as well, and fortunately enough a capable feeder was procured, Crutch, who is still in that position. Friends of the Hunt subscribed handsomely to enable actual hunting to continue.

The year following the War a joint Mastership was arranged, Mr. W. E. Paget taking the Tuesday and Saturday and Major Burnaby the Monday and Friday countries.

Under the joint Mastership of Major Burnaby and Mr. W. E. Paget the fortunes of the Hunt have improved rapidly since the years of the War, and its prosperity is up to pre-war days. The Quorn is a peculiar country—the Tuesday side, being composed of big woods and rough ground, stone walls and heather, is of course quite different from " The Top Country " ; *but*, the big woods are necessary—one side cannot get on without the other. The bitch pack hunts on Mondays and Fridays, on account of the great crowds, the bitches being faster than the dogs ; and there is a mixed pack on the Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Walter Wilson, who was selected for the post of huntsman during the last year of the War, has been an unqualified success—he has, in fact, done wonders during his seven seasons—and the Quorn bitches are to-day as good a working pack as can be found in England.

PART III

THE COTTESMORE

CHAPTER I

A COTTESMORE DIARY

"Nov. 15. 1769—Found in the bogg by Rocots, ran to Summerby, by Knoston to Owston Wood, to ye Castle Hill Burroughs and earthed."—TOM NOEL.

THE historian of the Cottesmore Hunt has yet to be born—or, if he graces this century with his presence, has yet to feel the spur of inspiration to set about the task.

Of the Belvoir, we have Mr. T. F. Dale's most excellent history—a model of what such a work should be—and of the Quorn, in addition to Mr. Blew's "The Quorn Hunt and its Masters," there is much valuable material, apart from the unfortunate fact that so little has been recorded of Hugo Meynell. In the near future we look forward to the publication of Squire Osbaldeston's Memoirs, just brought to light, which will undoubtedly fill many gaps in the history of the Quorn.

Though they will not bear comparison with memoirs such as these, the extracts from the diary of Tom Noel—whose name is associated with the earliest records of the Cottesmore country—which are here printed for the first time through the kindness of Mr. Henry Noel, are veritable "flashlights" on the hunting of that distant period.

The diary covers a considerable portion of the last half of the eighteenth century, commencing in 1766, thirteen years after Hugo Meynell first came to Leicestershire, and, with some blanks (notably between 1773 and 1780), continuing until a few years before the hounds became the property of Sir William Lowther about 1788.

Bald and brief as these entries are, their very brevity gives them a certain fascination. They read like the jottings of a man who was too busy hunting to do more than record the runs of each day in the simplest possible terms—the number of foxes noted in his "bag" for each season, tabulated according

to the three counties in which he hunted, is proof of his industry and enthusiasm.

In the library at Catmose there is a three-quarter-length portrait of Tom Noel, painted in oils. He wears a black velveteen coat with a single button on the right side and a high collar; his waistcoat is dull red, cut square, with three brown buttons set aslant from top-right to left. His powdered hair blends with a white stock which is enclosed by the upright collars of his coat. The face in the picture is grave and composed—typical of all great huntsmen—but capable, one may imagine, of lighting up with the fire of a caustic wit; for there is a hint of the cynical in the tawny brown eyes. The eyebrows are dark and high on a well-developed forehead, the nose is long and aristocratic, and the mouth small, with lower lip rather full. The painting is not a great work of art, but it conveys the self-reliant and determined character of the man.

Before quoting from the diary it will not be out of place to print in full an article on the Cottesmore which appeared in *Land and Water* over the pseudonym "Plantagenet" on November 12th, 1899, in which reference is made to Tom Noel:

THE COTTESMORE HOUNDS

"Of the early history of the Cottesmore Hunt, and even of its middle age, so little has been written that it is almost impossible to weave the few known facts into a continuous chronicle. By long and diligent research it would doubtless be possible to discover more, but nobody has yet undertaken the task or found out where all the hidden material lies. This is passing strange, considering that the Cottesmore Hunt, or rather its pack, must have been famous nearly a century ago, when some of the hounds bred by Lord Lonsdale were freely used by such kennels as the Belvoir, Brocklesby, and Quorn. In my mind there is some doubt whether the Cottesmore owed its foundation to that Lord Lonsdale who, while yet Sir William Lowther, changed the old family pack of harriers—which had been in existence for a hundred and thirty years—into fox-hounds. That was rather more than a century ago. Beyond this, however, all seems indefinite. Dick Christian, who was born at Cottesmore, but who cannot perhaps be relied upon as an unimpeachable authority, told 'The Druid' that a Mr. Noel, of Exton, was the first 'accorded' Master, and that Arthur Abbey, whose merits are epitomised for posterity in the single phrase, 'he was a big, heavy man with a rasping, strong

voice,' acted as huntsman then, as he did to Sir Gilbert Heathcote in the next decade, when Christian whipped-in to him. It is known with some approximation to certainty that Sir Gilbert's Mastership lasted from the closing year of the last century until the ninth of this, and as Lord Gainsborough preceded him it is clear that if Mr. Noel's reign was not a very short one, it must have begun before 1790, about which date the names of his hounds are certainly to be found as sires in the lists of kennels where they would hardly have been used without possessing some previous claim to distinction. That so much could have been achieved in the course of a few years by Sir William Lowther, and that he should have passed the pack over to other hands immediately, one can hardly conceive probable. All these points, however, may possibly be elucidated at some future time by the kindness of Lord Lonsdale, in whose possession there must be an undiscovered mine of historical wealth relating to the Cottesmore. Two years after Sir William Lowther was raised to an earldom, he took the hounds again, and from that time until the last fourteen years they have always been identified, more or less, with the family of Lord Lonsdale. There was, however, one rather lengthened and important interregnum to which the authors of 'Hunting' in the Badminton series make no reference whatever, and yet they apparently endeavoured to gather all material facts concerning the Cottesmore. It must be rather by accident than otherwise that the name of Sir John Trollope, afterwards Lord Kesteven, should have been omitted by the Duke of Beaufort, who probably knows as well as any person living what were the merits of hounds bred during Sir John's Mastership. We are told that Sir Richard Sutton held the reins of office for a short but brilliant time, but of the man to whom the old Cottesmore pack owed most of its high quality, not a word is said.

"Another M.F.H. of celebrity in his day was Mr. Henley Greaves, who, with Jack Treadwell as his huntsman, had the Cottesmore before he went to the Southwold in 1852. Whether Sir John Trollope succeeded immediately, or after another brief lapse, to the Lowthers, is a point about which some doubt exists. At any rate, Sir John Trollope was Master soon after 1860, when such sires as the Meynell Alfred, Foljambe's Furrier, Brocklesby Vaulter, Sir Watkin Wynn's Royal, Lord Henry Bentinck's Dorimont, and Belvoir Stormer were being used. Sir John Trollope became Lord Kesteven in 1868, and continued his mastership for some years afterwards. Towards the close he seems to have entered comparatively few hounds, and those of strains closely akin, so that when the Lord Lonsdale of that time took upon himself the prerogative of his family, he had to strengthen the pack by a good

many drafts. These came mainly from the Milton and Mr. Tailby's, while for home breeding, Lord Fitzhardinge's famous Carver and Caliban, both full of the old Grove and Burton blood, were used. A year or two later, the Badminton Badger pies were introduced, through Hardwick and Wildfire, whose progeny had so much effect on the pack for a generation or two that the unfashionable colour became more prominent than fastidious eyes cared for. All the Hardwicks and Wildfires, however, were such thoroughly keen foxhounds, and so full of dash, that no huntsman of those days could have refrained from attempting to perpetuate their merits. Jack West was huntsman then, and he certainly did not value colour above other qualities. When William Neal took the horn, after having whipped in to the Cottesmore a great number of years, he still bred much on the old lines, using their own sires mainly, but with occasional dips into Milton and Belvoir blood. Lord Carington, who took the Mastership when Lord Lonsdale resigned in 1878, changed nothing, but when Mr. William Baird, who has now ruled for thirteen seasons, took office as successor to Lord Carington in 1880 he immediately began improving the pack with a view to colour as well as quality. For this purpose he obtained strong drafts from Milton and a few couples from the Belvoir. Thus the famous strains of Fallible and Weathergage were introduced to the Cottesmore kennels. At the time, however, no sire did them more good than Holderness Rebel, who was by Brocklesby Rocket (the famous descendant of Ruler and Vaulter lines), and his dam Remnant sprang from some of the highest foxhound lineage of her day. Though Belvoir, Milton, and Grafton strains were freely used, during the next two or three years it was left for Gilson, who succeeded Neal as huntsman in 1888, to impress upon the pack a character which now distinguishes it. All his early training as a whip tended to imbue him with the idea that a pack never looked quite level and sorty unless all the hounds were as nearly as possible of one colour, and to that end he has constantly striven. He has not quite achieved it yet. Some of the older strains are far too good to be got rid of for a mere ideal, and Gilson is far too good a houndman to think of it, but having spent much of his time at Brocklesby, he naturally inclines towards the rich tan that prevailed there as much as at Belvoir, and he is getting it by judicious crosses. Though George Gilson is still a quite young man, his record is a long one. He began riding second horse for Sir Charles Slingsby, in the York and Ainsty country, before that keenest of sportsmen came to his tragic end by being drowned in the Ure. After that he whipped in to Nimrod Long at Brocklesbury, and left there for the Quorn, where he was first whip to Tom Firr until

1875, when the country was divided, Earl Ferrers taking the Charnwood Forest side. With the latter, Mr. Coupland found Gilson a huntsman's post, and that he held for four seasons. His success as a huntsman and popularity among residents of the country were proved when he left by the presentation of handsome testimonials, including a cup given by Lord Ferrers, a purse of sovereigns subscribed by members of the Hunt, and other substantial recognitions of merit. Then he went to hunt the York and Ainsty under Captain Slingsby, with whom and with Captain Brocklehurst he remained in that country seven seasons, earning golden opinions, which were expressed when he left in presentation of pictures limned by Captain Slingsby's facile pencil, valuable testimonials from Captain and Mrs. Brocklehurst, a reproduction of the York and Ainsty Hunt picture given by Mrs. Fairfax, and an album in which are portraits of several North-country celebrities. From the York and Ainsty Gilson went to the South Durham, but only stayed there one season before the opportunity came to him of carrying the horn in the Shires, where he finds a field for the exercise of talents which Lord Ferrers discovered and did his best to nurture years ago. It was from that Master probably more than from any other that Gilson received his first incentive to the study of hound science, which he now puts to such good use."

The Noel of tradition was evidently a very vague figure for the writer of this article, and Mr. T. F. Dale says little about him in his section dealing with the Cottesmore in " Fox-Hunting in the Shires." But can one be surprised at the difficulty of collecting information about the forefathers of modern hunting, when Osbaldeston's memoirs, written in his own hand, have been non-existent as far as hunting literature is concerned for nearly a hundred years?

Tom Noel's diary is written on double sheets of thick white note-paper, covered on both sides with his careful and clear script, and not bound together in any way. The paper is discoloured with age, although, except for variations of spelling (especially in place-names) and some obscurities as to the meaning of certain phrases, the sheets are as legible as on the day they were written.

The sheets containing the diary for each year are folded in three, wrapped in another sheet of note-paper and inscribed with the first and last meets

of the season, also the total bag of foxes killed. The inscription for 1767–8 reads :

Fox Chases in 1767 I Began at
Hambleton Wood Monday Oct 12
Ended at Garby Goss Monday
March 14

Brace.
Kild this Year 29½

"TEA TURNOPS."

Throughout the diary there is nothing of a personal or descriptive nature —not even a hound is referred to by name—and read consecutively his entries are extremely monotonous. But singled out at random they are well worth quotation. Each page contains the record of several days' hunting, while at the foot of each the figures of the bag are given : "Brace 1½," etc., as the case may be. Most of the hunting is in the woodlands—the present Monday and Thursday countries—but the total bag for the year is divided according to county. Thus in 1767 twenty-nine and a half brace of foxes were killed ; eleven brace in Leicestershire, seven in Lincolnshire, and eleven and a half in Rutland.*

* The following list gives the number of brace of foxes killed in seven years :
1766—41 ; 1767—29½ ; 1768—56¼ ;
1769—42½ ; 1770—40 ; 1771—44½ ;
1772—43½.

The diary entries are so much alike that one might begin anywhere and end anywhere. A start can be made with the page containing what is surely the gloomiest record of a blank day which has ever appeared in a hunting diary (Dec. 10th); its gloom is heightened by the forbearance of the diarist from making any comment.

1767

Tuesday Dec. 8—Found at Hambleton Wood ran there some time to Linding back to Hambleton Wood & kild—Found again at Linding Goss, ran to Linding to Ediweston to Armley, to Barnesdale, to Burley Park, back to Hambleton Town and Lost.

Thursday 10—Tryed Pryers Coppey, Tampions Coppey, Launde Park Wood, the Great Wood, Lodington Redish, Tugby, Skevinton, Tilton, Ouston, Lady Wood, Orton Park Wood, Barleythorpe Bushes & did not Find.

Saturday 12—Found at Ranksburough ran to Cold Orton, back to Ranksburough, the same Round; to Whisendine to Lesthup, to Pickwell Town to the Hill (there an Untapige, a Fresh Fox) ran to Dalby to Burton to Thorpe Whiped Off.

Monday 14—Found at Tickencote Laund, ran to Wood Head to Rayon Lings to Bloody Oaks, to Empingham Wood, to the stepping stone foard, to Inthorpe, to ye Laund & kild. Found at East Wood, ran to Tolthrup Oaks, over Hornby to Newell to Wood Head Earthed in a Swallow Pit.

Wednesday 16—Found at Tea Turnops ran to Tea Town to a Cabidge Garding (an Untapige there) ran to Woodhall Head to Thistleton back allmost to Woodhall Head & kild.

Friday 18—Found at Toltrup Oaks ran sometime Earthed. Found at Turnpole Earthed and dug the Fox. Found at Newell ran to Pickworth to Clipsham and whiped off.

Saturday 19—Found at Burley Park ran through Burley Closes to Cotesmore Wood, to Exton Park, to Tunerly, Westland Cotesmore Wood back to Burley at ye Inginan Untapige at Frears Farm kild.

Brace 2

This page is given exactly as it is arranged and written, both as regards punctuation and spelling. The expression "an Untapige there" occurs throughout the diary, but its meaning is obscure.* The bag for the

* The word "Untapige" may be derived from the French *piège*—a trap or snare; and the expression may indicate that the run came to an untimely end through the fox being trapped.

season was always given at the end of the last entry in place of the usual bag recorded on each page. The arrangement of the entries does not vary nor does the handwriting change until after April 23rd, 1773, when the diary as written by Tom Noel ends. Further quotations are confined to selected entries.

Except for a reference at an earlier date to Stockerston and Allexton Woods, Tom Noel appears to have been wholly engaged in what is now the Cottesmore Thursday country from September 23rd to November 5th, 1768. As his habit was to tabulate his bag according to counties, he probably operated mainly on that basis. His hounds must have had admirable training in the Woodlands across the Great North Road. They seem to have done great execution at this period and the bad scenting days which he records are remarkably few. Only once or twice has he to take hounds home on account of scent failing. The end of the year finds him back at Owston Wood. But in December nine days of continuous fog stopped hunting. The diary continues :

Sat. Dec. 24.—Found at Burley Park, ran to Barnsdale, to ye Park, back to Barnsdale, to Armley, to Hambleton Wood, to Linding Goss, to Wing Goss, to Glaston, to Morcot, to South Luffenham, to North Luffenham Town, to Normington Park (an Untapige there) ran to Ketton Stone Pitts, kild.

Thurs. Dec. 29.—Found at Tea Turnops, ran to Ashwell, to Burley Copes, to Cotesmore Wood, to Westland Wood, to Tunerley Wood, over the Park to Empingham, to Bloody Oaks, to Hardwick Wood, to Rasons Lings, to Merrimans Lodge, to Newell, to Turnpole, to Woodhead, back to Turnpole, to Newell, to Hollowell Town, to Seulthorps, to the ferr plantation by ye house, kild.

If this line was run by the same fox, it was a very fine hunt. From Teigh (Tea Turnops) to Holywell, via Empingham, totals over twelve miles, in a direct line to each place.

Fri. Jan. 6. 1769—Found at the Cotchers close by Woodmanham, ran to Woodmanham, to Edmundthorp, to Card Hill, to Whisendine, to Rocots, to Ranksburrow, to Brook, to Ridlington, to Leigh Lodge, stoped ye hounds by Laund.

The next season, but the same year, a number of entries refer to the Tilton country :

Mon. Oct. 2.—Found at Tilton, ran to Skevinton Highfield, back to Tugby Wood, to Tilton Wood, backwards and forwards three hours and lost.

Wed. Oct. 4.—Found at Laund Great Wood, ran to Tilton, Tugby, back to Laund, there 2 hours and left.

Fri. Oct. 6.—Found Ouston Great Wood, ran to the Fox-hill, to Ouston Town, to Halsted Boggs, to Badgrave, to Croston Town, to Hungerton, to Quenby & earthed.

Fri. Nov. 3.—Tried Garlick Hill, the Ryce, Burrow Hill, all the turnops & did not find. Found at Ranksbery Hill, ran to Cold Overton Town, to Pickwell, to Burrow Hill, over Dalby More, to Burton Laser, to Brentenby, to Wiverby, to Saxby, to Gartree Goss and whiped off.

In the entries for the years 1770 and 1771 there are several references to the Quorn, and considerable variation in the spelling of Meynell's name, as in other names and words throughout.

Mon. Nov. 26. 1770—My hounds was trying the Fer-hill by Ouston (Mr. Mennill braught a fox there,) ran to Knauston, to Cold Orton, to Lady Wood, to Bran Bushes back to Lady Wood, Orton Park, to Langham Town to Tea, to Market Orton, through Woodhall Head, by Gartrup to Sproson, back to Buckminster Park and kild.

Mon. Sept. 30. 1771—Found at Tugby, ran into Mr. Mennells at Tilton Wood, ran by Whadborough to Ouston, kild.

Thurs. Oct. 10.—Found at Ouston ran there some time, to the House. Kild by a flock of sheep.

Sat. Oct. 12.—Found at Orton Park Wood, ran there and Lady Wood some time round Fliteress & kild. Hunted a fox through Barleythorp Pastur, Rocots, Ranksbery, to Whisendine Town, lost.

This is one of the very few entries where the word " lost " occurs, they nearly all end with " kild " or " earthed." The next betrays a slight note of irritation :

Fri. Dec. 7.—Tried Woodhall-head. All the Turnops about Tea & Womandham & all the Gosses & did not find.

Sat. April 4. 1772.—Found at the Thorns, to Elsey Wood, over Old Hills, to Grimmthorpe Hous to ye Oaks, an Untapige there.

After 1772, entries are often followed by the letters Y.H. and O.H.,* and the diary as kept entirely by Tom Noel may be said to end. Lord Gainsborough is mentioned in several of these later entries, and seems to have occupied the position of joint Master, as further quotations will show.

Sept. 21. 1771.—Lord Gainsborough went to Stapleford Goss—kild, to Burton Goss—kild. Ran from Burton to Whissendine back by Jericho, to ye Goss and kild.

The inscription written on the wrapper enclosing the sheets of the diary for 1772–3 reads thus :

" Lord Gainsborough began to hunt Sep. 7, I began Saturday 26—Foxes killed in 1772, Began at Carby Wood Monday Sept. 7, ended at Grimthorpe Friday April 23, 1773.

	Brace
Kild	$43\frac{1}{2}$ "

There is an agreement which was drawn up between Mr. Meynell and Lord Gainsborough with regard to certain coverts, and which refers to Tom Noel, Lord Gainsborough acting in his interests. This agreement is dated 1766 :

" Owston, Laund, Tilton, Skeffington, Loddington, Tugby, Allexton, & Stockaston Woods, Easton Park & the woods near Holt to be neutral coverts ; No coverts on the Langton side of those above-named to be drawn by Lord Gainsborough. Ashby Pasture not to be drawn by Lord Gainsborough. Billesdon Coplow to be neutral. No coverts on the Quorn side of Billesdon Coplow to be drawn by Lord Gainsborough. All earths in both hunts to be stopt in common.

" On these conditions Mr. Meynell will engage to draw no coverts, except those above-named, which he understands to be claim'd by Lord Gainsborough as belonging to Mr. Noel's Hunt.

" Mr. Meynell hopes he shall be permitted to run his young hounds in Beaumont Chase, for the purpose of breaking them from Deer, which he has no means of doing elsewhere ; and provided he is indulged with that liberty, he will submit to any restrictions with respect to drawing the Chase Lord Gainsborough shall think proper to prescribe.

* Probably young hounds and old hounds.

" Should these proposals be acquiesced in, the only covert of any consequence hitherto drawn by Lord Gainsborough, which he would agree not to draw is Ashby Pasture. Among the coverts, which Mr. Meynell has for some years been in the practice of drawing which by this agreement he would be debar'd from drawing are Prior's, Brown's, and Tampion's Coppice, Lady Wood, Orton Park and Burton Gorse."

Mr. Dale throws much light on the subject of a joint Mastership in the following paragraph from his book " Fox-Hunting in the Shires " :

" Like most Masters of his time, Mr. Noel began by hunting over a large and undefined country which, as time went on and foxes became more numerous, was gradually reduced to its present limits. At one time, in the middle of the eighteenth century, part of the present Cottesmore and a portion of the Belvoir were hunted by a sort of joint-stock company, consisting of the Duke of Rutland and Lords Cardigan, Gainsborough, Gower and Howe."

Lord Gainsborough separated from this group in 1732, and began to hunt what is now known as the Cottesmore country. He died in 1751, and it is the sixth Earl who is mentioned in Noel's diary (see page 167). Later entries continue :

Mon. Jan. 7. 1772—Lord Gainsborough began to hunt. Found at Corby Hows, ran there and Carlby Spinney, two hours and kild.

Fri. Oct. 2.—Found at a New Spinney by Pickwell, ran to Rocots, to Ranksberry, to Langham, to Ashwell, to Whissendine, to Rocots, to Orton Town, to Rocots, to Ranksberry, to Langham, to Ashwell Town back for Whissendine, kild. Y.H.

Fri. Dec. 18.—Found in Exton Park, ran to Cottesmore Wood, through Greetham Bushes to Greetham Wood, to Pickworth Wood, there some time, to Aspernell Wood, to Greetham, to Stretton Wood, to Little Hay, to Clipshaw Wood, to Stretton Wood, to Mawkery, to Greens Lodge, to Swafield Common, to Corby Little Wood, to Bitcknaves, had the fox amongst the hounds, obliged to whip off it being almost dark.

This fox seems to have deserved his life if ever a fox did, but he ran things rather fine.

The last entry in what is presumably still Noel's own diary, though even here the style is different, is dated 1773 :

Sat. May 10.—Found in Bourne Wood, ran several foxes, could not make much out, went and found again in Thurlby Great Wood, ran three or four rings round the cover, went away by the Town. Pointd for Dykes Wood, headed back for Oak Wood, where after running two or three rings, killd. It was an old dog fox, ran very hard.

Bourne is still the last meet of the season, but May foxes are no longer killed.

After an interval of seven years the diary continues, written by a different hand; one or two entries will suffice.

Mon. Dec. 28, 1780.—Found in Empingham Wood. The hounds part[d], part for Empingham Heath to Kelton, to Forester's Bridge. Lost at Luffenham Goss. Other part went for Redbrookes. Lost again in Empingham field, found again, upon the heath, then hounds join: went round the heath. Lord Gainsborough ordered us to whip off. Y.H.

Mon. Feb. 4. 1781.—Found in Jacksons Goss, went for the Warren. Lost the fox in Cottesmore Field, found again in Woodhall Head, went away for Edmundthorp for Chard hill, headed back over Teigh, Cotchers Goss, over Whissendine Township, went to ground in a Drane by the Town. Found again at Ranksborough, went over part of Lang[m] L[d] [ship], head over Whissondine, losers by the Drane, by Roakhard to Cold Orton, round the town. headed Back to Ranksboro, across Lang[m] L[d] [ship] for Ashwell town, over Cottesmore L[d] [ship] for Burly Park, whipt of. There was a deal of Hard running and good hunting. O.H.

This extract is quite racy in style; the reference to the Whissendine Brook, some jumping it, others finding a way round, is almost as involved as a certain type of modern sporting journalism, with its constant reference to "the pilot setting his mask," and "the executor cutting out the work"; anything but the simple words "fox running." We miss the austere directness of Noel himself, with his "kild" and "earthed," his "swallow pits" and "Turnops."

Three more entries must end these quotations, all telling of hard hunting and some disappointment or disaster.

Wed. Feb. 6. 1781. Found at Dogsikes, came up for Bytham field, got into the Rock at Bytham. Hounds view[d] the fox in. found again at Cabbage Hill wood, came for Bytham town, back again thro' the wood

& for Gotar, Swayfield pasture, Swayfield wood, Briary wood, thro' Beadhous wood to Beaumont, Tortershell, Mawkrey, Stretton Woods there they Part : got them stopt as soon as we could. Ran monstrous hard. O.H.

Tue. Nov. 13. 1781. Found at Pickworth Wood, it being high wind, came for wood. Fox ran there and Greetham Woods a long while. Mr. Tryon shot a martin that the hounds tree[d], and killed a fox, we thought, as the hounds was very near a tired one and stopt suddenly and came off. Y.H.

EDMONDTHORPE.

Sat. Nov. 17. 1781. Found at Owston Wood, went for Halstead Bogg, for Loseby, to Quinby, there lost, suppose the fox to be killed by some foul means, as the hounds ran very hard all the time. O.H.

We must now take leave of the redoubtable Tom Noel, though hours might be spent over his faded pages—practically every entry raises some point of interest, though some are hard to decipher ; not the caligraphy, but the sense. There is an entry for April 10th, 1770 : " Found at Corby Wood, ran to Dogsikes, to Pickworth Wood (there some time) changed to a martin

and kil[d]." The cubbing fixture for September 7th, 1925, was Dogsight Wood.

A note by Noel in 1767 reads: "went to London March 10th. Staid there till April 16th. Killed from March 10 to April 16, five weeks, 6½ brace of foxes." After several entries we find: "Foxes kill[d] the time Mr. Noel was at London," and finally: "A lease of Foxes found first a Mawkrey, run him by Lobthorp to ye Park house, Kil[d], to Tarteshell Wood, Killed another in Cabbage hill, he never run at all."

One of Tom Noel's great days has been recorded in verse, a worthy companion to the Billesdon Coplow Run, though the poet is in this case unnamed:

A CELEBRATED CHASE

5th November, 1771

Hark! Hark! Jolly sportsmen awhile to my tale,
To gain your attention I'm sure cannot fail;
'Tis of hounds, and of horses, and lads that ne'er tire,
O'er hedges and ditches, thro' dale, bog, or mire:
A pack of such hounds and a set of such men,
'Tis a hundred to one if you meet such again;
Had Nimrod, that mightiest of Hunters, been there,
By Jove! he'd have shook like an aspen for fear.

In seventeen hundred and seventy-one,
The fifth of November, or sixth, 'tis all one,
At eight in the morning, by most of the clocks,
We rode forth from Cottesmore in search of a fox;
The Exton Town landlord, the bold Horace Mann,
Long Powis, Old Sussex, and Sly Sullivan,
Parson Lambert, Tom Noel, that huntsman so stout,
Sam, Charles, a few others, and so we went out.

We cast off our hounds for an hour or more,
When Crowner set up a most *tuneable* roar,
"Hark to Crowner," cried Will, and the rest were not slack,
For Crowner's no trifle esteemed in the pack;
Old Bluster and Nancy came readily in,
And the rest of the hounds joined the musical din;
Had Diana been there she'd been pleased to the life,
As all of the lads got a Goddess to wife.

Ten minutes past ten was the time of the day,
When Reynard broke covert, and this was his way;
As strong from Great Owston, as tho' he'd no fear,
Through Launde Wood and Tilton, his course did he steer,

To Loddington Reddish, and then right across
Up Buttermilk Hill, and to Stapleford Gorse,
Round Storers he brushed, leapt Ld. Harborough's wall,
And seemed to say, "Little I value you all."

To Leesthorpe he ran, and through Suffield's deep grounds,
Dick Branston, Tom Church, at the tail of the hounds,
The earth it was open, yet he was so stout,
Tho' he might have got in, yet he chose to keep out;
Through Whissendine field was the way that he flew,
At Ranksborough Covert we had him in view,
He drove on through Rocots, at Braunston he waded,
Prior's Coppice he traversed, where Suffield grew jaded.

Through Orton Park Wood, like an arrow he passed,
Headed back by the steep hills of Burley at last,
Then gallantly threw himself into the Garden,
"*Bar Lowley*," he cried, "I don't heed you a farthing;
But soon to his cost he perceived that no bounds
Could stop the pursuit of such staunch mettled hounds,
His policy here did not serve him a rush,
Five couples of Tartars being hard at his brush.

To recross the Park then again was his play,
But e'er through the rails he could now make his way,
He found both of speed and of cunning a lack,
Being way-laid and killed by the rest of the pack;
At his death there were present the lads I have sung,
Sorely jaded Kit Fisher, poor Suffield got flung.
Thus ended at length a most delightful chase,
Which held us 5 hours and 10 minutes' space.

We returned to Lord Gainsborough's plentiful board,
Where dwelt hospitality, Truth and my Lord,
We talk'd over the chase, and we toasted a health
To the man that ne'er varied for places or wealth.
"Horace Mann baulked a leap," cried Long Powis, "that's odd,"
Cries Lambert, "A sin, by the mighty Nimrod,"
"I holload," cried Stephen, "get on tho' you fall,
Or I'll leap over you, your bald gelding and all."

Each glass was adopted to freedom and sport,
As for party affairs, we consigned to the Court,
Thus finished the rest of the day and the night,
In gay flowing bumpers and social delight;
Then till the next morning bid farewell each brother,
So some they went one way, and some went another,
And as Phœbus befriended our earliest roam,
So Luna took care in conducting us home.

CHAPTER II

EARLY HISTORY OF THE COTTESMORE

"Unless I had kept a regular journal of all that has been done in the kennel from the time when my young hounds were first taken in to the end of the last season, it would be impossible, I think, to answer all the questions which, in your last letter, you ask concerning them."—PETER BECKFORD.

IT is not possible within the limits of this book to attempt a connected history of the Cottesmore, elaborated—as such a history would have to be—with many quotations and long extracts from contemporary documents and later authorities, often confusing and sometimes contradictory as they are. As an example, the year of Tom Noel's death is variously given as 1771, 1778, or even after 1788, about which date, according to old records of the Hunt, he sold his hounds to Sir William Lowther.

But such quotations as there is space for here help to throw light on this interesting period in the annals of a pack which, about the middle of the eighteenth century, were sometimes referred to as "The Exton Hounds," sometimes as "Old Noel's Hounds," and later as "The Cottesmore."

First we have in "British Hunting," edited and compiled for *The Sportsman* by Arthur W. Coaten, a fuller account of what Mr. Dale calls "the joint-stock company": "No less interesting than the histories of the Quorn and the Belvoir is that of the Cottesmore, which rivals them in antiquity, as it is certain that hounds were kept at Exton Park in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, if not even before that. An agreement was made between John, Duke of Rutland; George, Earl of Cardigan; Baptist Noel, Earl of Gainsborough; John, Lord Gower; and Scrope, Lord Howe, by which these sportsmen were to take equal shares in the expenses of a pack of foxhounds kennelled 'from the 15th of October to the end of November in Croxton Park; from the 1st of December to the last day of January at Cottesmore; from the 1st of February to the last day of March at Thawson; and from the 1st of April to the 14th of October at such places as shall be determined by the party.'

"That interesting arrangement with various variations was carried out when the eighteenth century was yet young, but in 1752 Lord Gainsborough

separated from the group, and took as his share of the hounds twenty-five couples. It is to that year, therefore, that we may definitely trace the history of the Cottesmore, then known as '*Old Noel's Hounds*,' but, as is the case with all other ancient Hunts, their country was very different from that as we now know it, extending as it did over large tracts of the Shires of Leicester, Northampton, Rutland, and Nottingham.

"The Earl of Gainsborough, to whom allusion has just been made, died in 1751, his eldest son Baptist, who succeeded him, being then a boy of eleven, and he only survived his father eight years. Meanwhile the widowed Countess had married secondly, in 1756, *Mr. Tom Noel*, and it was he and the sixth Earl who kept on the hounds until they came into the hands of the Lowther family."

The next quotation from the same work gives some interesting details concerning the upkeep of Tom Noel's hounds, and also refers to the agreement drawn up between Mr. Meynell and Lord Gainsborough, already given in full in the first chapter. It also contains the statement that Noel died in 1771. In the diary there is a note by Noel in 1773: "I came from London Monday 22nd of March." After that date, although the entries are written by another hand, there is no reason to suppose he was not still living, and the Hunt records bear out the fact that he was alive about 1788. But in "British Hunts and Huntsmen," compiled in conjunction with *The Sporting Life* and published by the Biograph Press, there is the following statement: "Tom Noel got on well with his step-sons (sons of the Earl of Gainsborough, whose widow he married) and lived at Exton, the Earl's seat, keeping the hounds, till he died in 1778." These conflicting dates are merely mentioned *en passant*. The next extract mainly concerns the hounds: "Kennel accounts of the Exton Foxhounds were kept with scrupulous care and exactitude by the huntsmen William and Arthur Abbey, and there are books of hunting accounts, even antecedent to these, kept by them. Both Exton Park and Cottesmore were the property of the Earls of Gainsborough of that period, and still belong to the present holder of that title; as a matter of fact, the greater part of the Cottesmore country is the property of the present Lord Gainsborough. A member of the family, Colonel W. F. N. Noel, of North Nibley, Dursley, Glos., has gone carefully into the accounts kept by the two Abbeys, and he calculates by the quantity of oatmeal consumed that Mr. Tom Noel's hounds numbered about forty couples. He estimates, too, by the amount of oats which were bought into the Exton stables, that about fifteen hunt horses were kept during the winter months, and about five during the summer.* At that far-off period in the

* The rest being turned out to grass.

history of the chase, hunt servants were certainly not overpaid, as John, Arthur, and William Abbey, the huntsmen and whippers-in, received £35 12*s.* 6*d.* per annum from 1771 to 1784. It would seem that, even in those early days, there were difficulties in regard to poultry farmers, as Colonel Noel points out that people managed to get their poultry killed by foxes, and their sheep worried by hounds. For the latter the reward varied from five shillings to half-a-guinea.

COTTESMORE COUNTRY: RANKSBOROUGH ON EXTREME LEFT, WYMONDHAM ROUGHS ON RIGHT.

There is no record in these accounts of the purchase of hunters or hounds, but the hounds which were sold fetched about £5 a couple. Two of the finest hounds owned by Mr. T. Noel and the Earl of Gainsborough were Venus (1753) and Painter (1780), whose pedigrees show relationship to hounds belonging to the Duke of Richmond and the old Charlton Hunt.

" As the years went on, the boundaries of the Cottesmore country became more clearly defined, and there was an agreement between Mr. Noel and Mr. Meynell that Durston, Launde, Skeffington, Loddington, Tugby, Allexton, and Stockaston Woods, Easton Park, and the woods near Holt . . ." (*Note :*

This agreement has been printed in full on page 160). " Thus amicably was the important question settled of the boundaries of the two great Hunts, and the wild pastures of Cottesmore, whose attractions were realised from the first, became famous for their straight-running foxes and for true sport.

" Mr. Tom Noel lived until 1771,* and for some years longer the hounds were kept on by the sixth Lord Gainsborough, who, by the way, never married. Then in 1788 the hounds passed into the possession of Sir William Lowther, afterwards the first Lord Lonsdale, who had before that time devoted himself mainly to his pack of harriers. By some historians this Lord Lonsdale has been termed the true founder of the Cottesmore Hunt, but it is difficult to understand how this statement can be justified, seeing that the establishment of Exton Park had been carried on for so many years previously. Lord Lonsdale's huntsman during his first mastership of the hounds was Philip Payne, whom Dick Christian described as ' a first-rate little fellow, who always swore by Lord Lonsdale's blood.'

" His Lordship having succeeded to the Lowthers' vast property, in Westmoreland, he gave up the hounds to Sir Gilbert Heathcote for four seasons, taking them over again in 1806, and there was not another change in the Mastership from that time until 1842. At this period in the history of the Cottesmore, Dick Christian, who stands immortalised in the flowing pages of ' The Druid,' is one of our best and most gossipy authorities. Before Lord Lonsdale's time he had seen the hounds of Mr. Meynell and Mr. Noel come together in the Ranksborough country, and ' Noel's had the best of it.' Later on there was a different tale to tell, for Mr. Assheton Smith and Lord Lonsdale clashed three times, when Christian was out, and each time it was Mr. Smith who got the fox. The garrulous Dick comments that Lord Lonsdale's hounds were not so quick in the open as their neighbours' were, but they had the longest runs, and they were capital killers in their fine wild country. For some time the hounds were kennelled by Lord Lonsdale at Stocken Hall, but he eventually brought them back to Cottesmore and lived there many years. ' He was a grand man for hounds, was his Lordship,' is Dick Christian's verdict upon one of the best and most popular sportsmen who ever hunted the Cottesmore country."

One of the huntsmen, William Abbey, is mentioned in the poem given in the preceding chapter: " ' Hark to Crowner,' cried Will "; and is also the subject of this somewhat startling epitaph :

* See page 167.

AN EPITAPH

On the Death of William Abbey, late Huntsman to the Earl of Gainsborough, who died 22nd April, 1772. Aged 69.

"Reader! behold a genuine son of Earth.
Like a true Fox Hound Sportsman from his birth,
O'er Hills, and Dales, o'er Mountains, woods and rocks,
With dauntless courage he pursued the Fox.
No danger stopt him, and no fear dismayed,
He scoft at fear, and danger was his trade.
But there's a bound no mortal can o'erleap,
Wide as eternity, as high, as deep.
Thither by Death's unerring steps pursued,
By that sagacious scent which none elude,
By a strong pack of fleetest years run down,
He leaves his whip, where monarchs leave their crown.
No shifts, no doubles could the Hero save,
Earth is his kennel, his abode the grave.
Still let us listen to his warning voice,
That sound which once made all the fields rejoice.
Let Exton's plains and Watcot's woods rebound
With the shrill cry that cheers the opening hound,
Hark! forward, Mortals! Forward, hark away!
Hark! to the summons of that awful Day
When the great Judge of quick and dead shall come,
And make each mouldering corpse to meet its doom.
For this important hour let us prepare;
'Midst all enjoyment this your constant care.
Then in this world let your affections live,
And leave on earth, what earth can never give.
With stedfast faith and ardent zeal arise,
Leap o'er Time's narrow bound, and reach the skies."

The continuation of this brief history is compiled from the old records of the Cottesmore Hunt.

Mr. Noel, as stated, sold his hounds about the year 1788 to Sir William Lowther, in whose possession, as Lord Lonsdale, they continued (with the exception of a few seasons intervening, 1802—1806, when they were the property of Sir Gilbert Heathcote) till 1842. Lord Lonsdale hunted the Cottesmore country for more than half a century, except for the above short break, occasioned by his "acception" to the vast property of his cousin, the former Lord in Westmoreland and Cumberland, which required his attention for a time. During the four seasons that Sir Gilbert Heathcote hunted the country he kept the hounds at his seat in Normanton Park.

Lord Lonsdale resigned the country in 1842, two years before his death, and the horses and hounds were sold. Sir Richard Sutton then came with his

COTTESMORE GORSE

own hounds from Burton and hunted the Cottesmore country till 1847, when he removed to Quorn. Mr. Henry Greaves took over the country and remained for five seasons at Cottesmore. He was followed by Mr. Barrows, with a pack drawn from various sources, who resigned in 1855.

Sir John Trollope was persuaded to take over the Mastership, and for two seasons hunted the whole country, then extending from Bourne in Lincolnshire to Tilton in Leicestershire, from east to west, and having an almost equal area from north to south. In 1857 he resold the hounds to Mr. Drake, but in the autumn, nobody being forthcoming to hunt the country, an arrangement was made between Sir John and Mr. Tailby that the former should take the area east of the Oakham-Melton road (about two-thirds of the whole) and the latter the remaining third. Sir John then took his hounds to Little Bytham and hunted from Casewick. He was created Lord Kesteven in 1868, continuing to hunt the country for two more seasons.

At a meeting held at the Crown Hotel, Oakham, on December 17th, 1869, the late Lord Lonsdale, then Colonel Lowther, M.P., accepted the Mastership. On the 8th March, 1870, the first stone of the new kennels was laid by his eldest son, Sir George Henry, Viscount Lowther, and on August 5th the hounds were removed to Barleythorpe from Little Bytham. Colonel Lowther, who became the Earl of Lonsdale in 1872, used to ride a chestnut horse called " The Doctor " from London to Cottesmore when he came to hunt.

Concerning the huntsmen of this period, Frank Goodall came to the Cottesmore in 1861 from the Oakley, remaining for two years, when he went to Mr. Tailby. He was succeeded by Charles Powall, who resigned from ill-health in 1867. John Watt then came from the Duke of Beaufort's, and remained for nine seasons. At a dinner given in the Stamford Hotel on November 10th, 1876 (the last year of Lord Lonsdale's Mastership), Watt was presented with a cup and two hundred and fifty sovereigns by the " Gentlemen of the Cottesmore Hunt and friends " in recognition of his services.

We find the following in the *Leicester Journal* in October 1871 : " Colonel Lowther, the Master of the Cottesmore Hounds, having put in his claim for that portion of the old Cottesmore country which has been for some years hunted by Mr. Tailby, the latter gentleman has intimated his intention of giving up his hounds after the present season, and we have the best authority for stating that Mr. Coupland, the Master of the Quorn, has offered to hunt the district not taken by Colonel Lowther, which was, until Mr. Tailby commenced, always part of the Quorn country."

A meeting was held at Wistow, the seat of Sir Henry Halford, Bart., to

decide what steps should be taken for hunting the Harborough country. Mr. Tailby consented to accede to the wishes of the meeting, and to continue to hunt such portions of his country as should remain after the Cottesmore claims were complied with. These claims are of interest here, because the country to be described in the succeeding chapters is mainly that hunted by Mr. Tailby after the division in 1857—what is now, for most of its extent, Cottesmore country in Leicestershire. But the county boundary will not be rigidly adhered to, the limits being defined by the Tuesday and Saturday fixtures of the Hunt.

In April 1872 we read in the old records : " The gentlemen who join in the Cottesmore Hunt are in high spirits regarding the future prospects of sport, the Earl of Lonsdale having determined to take the whole of the original country and to follow it up with zeal. His Lordship has bought the best of Mr. Tailby's pack, having purchased five lots of six hounds for £1300."

The Earl of Lonsdale died in August 1876, and the Mastership was taken by his son, who was succeeded two years later by Lord Carington.

On June 18th, 1880, at a meeting of the Hunt Committee held in London, it was proposed and carried that the Hunt should accept an offer made by Mr. Gosling to purchase the hounds from Lord Lonsdale and present them to the county. At the same meeting an offer from Mr. William Baird of Elie, Fifeshire, to hunt the country at his own expense, with certain reservations as to upkeep, was accepted ; and on July 2nd of this year the hounds were paid for and became the property of members and subscribers of the Hunt, Mr. William Baird being Master.

By an agreement dated July 2nd, 1881, and subsequently extended to 1890, the Earl of Lonsdale let to the Cottesmore the kennels and cottages, and the paddock known as the Kennel Field ; also the field on the north side of the kennels. All of these had been similarly let to Mr. Baird the previous year.

The present kennels at Burley, between Langham and Cottesmore, were first used on November 5th, 1890, the year that Mr. Baird was succeeded by Mr. Evan Hanbury.

Here, two and a half miles from the beautiful little village that gives the Hunt its name (unlike Quorndon, still much as it was in the early days), the Cottesmore hounds have remained. Beyond the village is Cottesmore Gorse, in the Thursday country, and opposite the kennels the trees of Burley Wood. Langham's tall spire rises among the old houses, two miles away, below Ranksborough ; while little more than a mile from the kennels is the town of

Oakham, on the outskirts of which is the residence of Mr. James Baird, who succeeded Lord Lonsdale as Master in 1921.

The previous successions after Mr. Evan Hanbury were Lord Lonsdale in 1907, General Brocklehurst (with Mr. J. Maunsell Richardson as Field Master) in 1911, Mr. Strawbridge in 1913, and Lord Lonsdale again in 1915, until Mr. James Baird associated the name of his family once more with the fortunes of the Hunt.

CHAPTER III

TUESDAY COUNTRY : TILTON AND LAUNDE

"I may be permitted to warn the new-comer when he first visits Tilton Wood, probably about the first Tuesday in November, not to be led away by the size of the wood into thinking he has plenty of time. It is wise politely but steadily to work to the head of the line and be as near the hounds as is right. They are a pack of flying bitches noted for their necks and shoulders, and they can race up and down hill faster than the best of us can follow."—T. F. DALE.

THE Cottesmore Tuesday country is divided into two areas, hunted on alternate Tuesdays; one may be roughly described as comprising Tilton and Launde, the other Owston and Ranksborough. No sharp division can be made between them, however, and both overlap (with some neutral coverts) the adjoining Saturday countries. Ranksborough, for instance, is drawn on both Tuesdays and Saturdays. What may be termed the far Saturday country is situated round Uppingham and joins the Tuesday country close to Ridlington and Belton; while the Melton Saturday country—and there is perhaps no more famous hunting area in the Shires—includes the Burton Flats and those historic names Stapleford, Whissendine, Somerby and Leesthorpe. It is divided from the Tuesday country by a boundary line drawn from the Melton-Oakham turnpike to Cold Overton, and thence following the road to Knossington, Owston, and along the ridge to Marefield.

The Tuesday country is bounded on the west by the Quorn territory, on the south by the Uppingham Turnpike, and on the east by the road from Belton through Braunston to Oakham, and the turnpike from Oakham to Langham.

The first Tuesday meet of the season is generally Tilton Wood, but the country is very different from that on the Quorn side of Tilton. We are on the west of the great escarpment, where, though the valleys are deep, the hills maintain their altitude, until they eventually sink to the Vale of Catmose. It is a country as different from the popular conception of Leicestershire as it could well be, reminding one rather of Devonshire coombes than those broad grasslands generally associated with the Shires. We will approach it by following

the course of the Eye—the second river of that name in Leicestershire—which rises from the high ground between Tilton and Billesdon.

There are some places on this escarpment where accurate observers claim to have seen the dividing of the watershed, the first small runnels which flow on either side, east and west. Whether this is true or not, one of the thin trickles of water that gradually gathers strength and finds a channel for itself is now called the Eye, and the valley that it has carved out through centuries, with the high ridges on either side, forms the Tilton country of to-day.

OWSTON WOOD AND WHADBOROUGH HILL.

Viewed from one of these ridges, the panorama of the country gradually unfolds.

A lane, grass-bordered and fringed by ash trees, leads south-west from Tilton to Skeffington. The fields dip on either side; on the north-east to a tributary of the Eye, on the south-west to the Eye itself. Looking almost due east from this lane, the skyline is broken by the crests of Whadborough, Robin-a-Tiptoe, and Colborough Hills. We are on a sort of "hog's back," and from it are able to follow the course of the Eye, which is eventually crossed by the lane when it leaves the ridge and sinks to the valley. Beyond, the

road climbs to nearly seven hundred feet, past wide fields, to Skeffington and the turnpike. From the turnpike, Skeffington Wood can be seen sloping down to the eastern bank of the Eye, while above is Tilton Wood, and on the north-east, Tryon's Spinney. Priest Hill Spinney, or Priesthood Hills Spinney, as it used to be called, is south-west of Skeffington Spinney on the near side of the brook.

This is the climax of the Cottesmore far Tuesday or Tilton country.

Mr. Dale writes of the sensations experienced by a new-comer to the opening meet of the Cottesmore at Tilton Wood.

" Just at first, when he reaches the fixture, he will be a little staggered by the number of people assembled, for if there was a crowd on Monday, it is a multitude gathered together on Tuesday. The train will have brought visitors from afar. Market Harborough, as well as Melton, looks to find its Tuesday's amusement with the Cottesmore ; more travel up from Rugby ; and those who live at Oakham, and are thus in the centre of hunting fashion, are of course there to a man. Besides the first qualms caused by the vast assembly of men and women, most of whom mean to ride, and all to see as much of the sport as circumstances and their own nerve will allow, the new-comer may well have his keen expectation somewhat shadowed by a feeling of dismay when he sees the country.

" Tilton Wood is the first fixture of the season by the Cottesmore for their Melton country. As we ride up to the meeting place beneath Robin-a-Tiptoe, and stand at the gate which looks down over the field below, the crowd of horsemen, the dark masses of the woods and the steep sides of the hills may well daunt us. Can these be the fair green pastures, flat and smooth, which we are accustomed to think of as the Cream of the Shires ? "

This famous Wood is one of the most prominent of all the coverts of the valley of the Eye, rising to the crest of the hill up which it climbs, above the formidable deep brooks or " bottoms " of the vales which surround it. It dominates much of the landscape when seen from the Tugby-Owston road, which divides Tugby Wood from Tugby Bushes, where Reddish Wood lies to the north-east. The hills seem formed on a gradually ascending scale, increasing in size as they approach the Tilton heights—truly a country to rather overawe those who see it for the first time. Tilton Wood can again be viewed *en masse* from the turnpike opposite Skeffington Hall, lying along the skyline on which is the lofty hamlet of Halstead, Colborough Hill, Whadborough behind it, and the white road to Oxey Farm and Loddington creeping over the crest. Here again is Robin-a-Tiptoe, like some great fort or earthworks,

ROBIN-A-TIPTOE

with two (or three) trees upon the summit. Most people would say three, but the summit is actually crowned by two sycamores, while the third tree, a stunted ash, is a little way down the slope, and only appears from some points of view to share the prominent position of the others. Between the trees the crest of Owston's forest is first visible; Launde Big Wood breaks the skyline on the right.

It is no easy task to view collectively these coverts which cluster along or climb above the winding course of the Eye, set in deep dales, like woodlands in a Devonshire valley. The nearest approach to a vista containing them all is the view over the vale seen after descending the Tugby Owston lane and crossing the brook: Skeffington Wood climbs up the north-east slope to meet Tilton Wood, now seen as though descending from its hill; Priest Hill Spinney rises towards the turnpike, Brown's Wood yet further up on the south-west flank; on the same side are Tugby Bushes and Tugby Wood, and on the north-east the great wood of Reddish below them sinks down to the stream. Close at hand is Round Hill Spinney, also known as Cocked Hat Spinney, from whose north-eastern side can be seen Launde Big Wood, lying in vast and gloomy shadow across the railway. Round Hill Spinney is long, sinuous and loftily placed; like most of these coverts its trees are oak and ash, with Scotch firs, larches and an occasional poplar. It looks across to Tryon's Spinney, sloping down to a streamlet of the Eye, beneath the heights of Colborough and Robin-a-Tiptoe. Thus viewed together, these coverts form a chain of valley woodlands, their varied growth of oak and ash broken by the deep note of the pines, the graceful larches, and the long spars of the poplars.

Mr. Dale makes an informative yet somewhat ludicrous comment on the quality of this Tuesday hunting:

"To hunt with a pack of hounds, such as the Cottesmore, in a wooded district like the Tilton and Owston portions of the Hunt, where thick, deep and often sticky coverts are surrounded by old turf carrying a good scent, is in itself a training in hunting craft. No one who does not pay close attention to hounds, or who cannot understand what is going on to a certain extent, will see much of the fun, unless fortune is very kind to him or he has a pilot better instructed than himself. But Melton goes to Tilton because after all most of the visitors to the former place love hunting as well as riding, hounds almost as much as horses. The Melton people are drawn from the class who have hunted for generations, and from those who with increasing wealth are gradually growing up into the habits and ways of thought of that class. The mere hard rider is the exception, nor as a rule does he last long at hunting. When, after a short

career of reckless riding punctuated by falls, he gives up hunting, he generally does so altogether, seeking distinction instead at the mouth of the golf hole or the hoop of the croquet lawn."

Possibly true, if a little unkind; but there are dangers awaiting even those who seek distinction at the mouth of the golf hole, especially if they stay there too long, while the hoop of the croquet lawn can be a most unpleasant place during moments of stress.

Leaving the valley prospect, and crossing the railway, wide pastures, bleak and almost treeless, climb the distant half-way ridge, and then ascend to one great wind-swept hill. There stands Ridlington in the far Saturday country.

One and a half miles beyond East Norton is Finchley Bridge, where the Eye leaves Cottesmore territory. The bridge marks the south-east limit of the Tuesday country, the boundary of which runs in a north-easterly direction to Belton, and includes Leighfield Forest, through Prior's Coppice (neutral to Tuesday and Saturday), thence along the Braunston road to Oakham. The square tower of Belton church is set in a valley on the lower slopes of the Ridlington heights.

From East Norton a road leads off to Loddington. There is a long rise up to the railway bridge, and then follows a precipitous fall to the ford. Here the brook (a tributary of the Eye) crosses the road, the shallow water rippling over the stones, and a bridle-lane, edged with trees, goes on to Loddington Mill and Tugby. Above the road, a field away, is Loddington Church, almost hidden by two tall yew trees. It is one of the most beautiful settings for a hunting scene in all Leicestershire. Another road climbs away from the valley, running alongside the railway—which unfortunately intrudes upon this quiet landscape—to Oxey Farm at the four cross-ways. Oxey Farm, by the way, is a Cottesmore fixture which should be marked on the hunting map. Just beyond is Stone Hill Farm, and from here the summit of Robin-a-Tiptoe is most easily reached. From the long steep slope can be seen the two sycamores and the ash tree—so far away that the fine scale of this country is realised. Below them are stunted ash and thorn trees. The trunk of a fallen giant, bleached by storms, lies beneath the sycamores. A carrion crow flapping among the branches overhead recalls the eerie story that gave the hill its name.

It is said that a labourer at Tilton Grange named Robin was to be hanged on the hill for sheep-stealing early in the eighteenth century. Either the rope was too long or the man unusually tall, and, his toes just touching the ground, he was able to escape his hanging by standing a-tiptoe, until under cover of darkness his friends cut him down.

Mr. Ellis of Tilton relates another version of the story :

" I always understood that the man Robin had three lives given him, when it was discovered that the rope was too new and had a lot of stretch in it, and that a former Earl of Radnor, who owned Tilton Manor for some time, planted three trees to commemorate the three attempts at hanging. Even to-day, if one of these trees blows down, another is planted in its place."

COLBOROUGH HILL AND TILTON, FROM ROBIN-A-TIPTOE.

The hill is described in Nichol's " History of Leicester " :

" Tilton—near to this town and almost opposite to Burrow, about two and a half miles distance thence, standeth a very steep hill called by the country people Robin-a-Tiptoe, upon the very top thereof hath been some old Roman fortifications, as may well be perceived by the deep trenches and ramparts very eminent on the south and west sides ; the north and east sides being more level. Mr. Tailby in 1799 says : ' It is a large eminence and in several points of view a long way visible (some say it may be seen from the Lincolnshire coast). It has a steepish ascent on all sides for a quarter of a mile ; on the top is a level surface, encompassed by a single ditch and low embankment supposed to be

Roman works, but by its nearness to Sauvey Castle, I should conjecture it was connected with that fortress. On the very summit of the hill, long ago were planted three ash trees which towered high and threw their branches far and wide. Two of them are now no more and the other is fast going to decay. These trees might be seen at a great distance and were distinguished by the name of Tilton Three Trees.' "

The fallen trunk is the last tree described by Mr. Tailby, the two sycamores and the little ash near them having taken the place of the original trio.

On all sides there is a panorama of great range and interest. Boston Stump, distant forty miles, can be seen from the top of the hill on a clear day. Away to the north-west is the Tilton ridge, with the church spire on the skyline, and Colborough Hill in the foreground; south-west is an unnamed spinney, prominent above the road which passes Loddington; south-east is Launde Big Wood, with Launde Park Wood barely visible, looking down on Leighfield Forest. Prior's Coppice is on the north-eastern skyline above the second of the great valleys, the valley of the Chater—the stream which flows between Owston Wood and Launde, past Coles Lodge and Leighfield Lodge, to join the Welland. Beyond Prior's Coppice is the third valley, through which flows the Gwash.

The fences in the valley of the Eye, if not very formidable in themselves, are often made so by the lie of the ground; and the brooks are not easy to cross, with none too many fords or bridges.

A meet in the Tilton country is a dilemma for a man whose stud can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and who has a week's hunting in view. There are only two safe courses to follow. One is to save your horse by keeping in touch with hounds (if not in act, in mind) and thus to have something in hand. Otherwise, by the time a rider has " plugged " uphill and plunged down again, to and fro from covert to covert, always a little late and inevitably finding hounds are back to where he started from, his horse will be in no state to take part in the fine run—and it may occur—to Launde, to Owston, or even to Barkby Holt. The other course is to stand about on hill-tops and wait on chance—hoping for a lucky opening—or till men, horses and hounds have hunted themselves to a standstill, and with scent confused or a fox having been killed, the order is " Owston Wood ! " This course cannot be recommended if it is snowing or one of those biting winds is howling round Colborough and Tilton—it is better to get hot and tired and go home early.

A steep country flanks the little vale running from the rugged mound of Sauvey Castle to Launde Big Wood. The ancient earthworks should more

LAUNDE BIG WOOD, FROM ROBIN-A-TIPTOE

properly be called Sauvey Camp, for they are overlooked by the surrounding hills—a camp of refuge, perhaps, guarded by ramparts and partly concealed by the high ground about it. The remains of what appear to have been primitive dwellings—now grass-grown banks—are situated in part of the enclosed area, recalling the hut clusters of ancient villages on the hills of western Cornwall.

Where the road to Launde rises above the vale, there is a view of the whole length of Owston Wood, with Whadborough Hill away to the left, and Withcote Church below the lofty skyline on the right. Withcote Hall is built beside a tributary of the Chater, close to the beautiful little church, rising above the brook and sheltered by the trees of the vale and the swell of the fields on either side. The road sinks again to Launde Abbey, an Elizabethan house of ironstone built on the site of the old Priory, past which the Chater flows to Cole's and Leighfield Lodges. Leland writes of Launde :

" The Soile betwixt *Trent* South Ripe and *Launde* is baren of Wood, but plentiful of Corne and Pasture, especially abowt *Launde* Quarters.

" But the Soyle abowt *Launde* is Wooddy, and the Forest of Ly, of sum caulled Lyfeld, joynithe to *Launde* by Este.

" And the Soile of *Owsen* Abbay ii. Miles by Est North Este from *Launde* is also veri Wooddy."

Through this rich country with its dark woods (at a time when Leighfield Forest was still uncleared and its miles of timber swept from crest to sombre crest up towards the Ridlington heights) ran the path used by the monks coming from Leicester to the Priory—the Old Launde Way. It followed a course past Humberstone and Scraptoft to Ingarsby, where was one of the granges to the Abbey, and then by Tilton and Halstead to Launde. At Humberstone there is a place still called Monk's Rest. Leland visited many of these abbeys before the Dissolution, when they were places of beauty and splendour in harmony with the opulence of the landscape, which even to-day has a sense of the austere magnificence of a past age. There is something solemn about the precincts of Launde, something that seems like an echo of those words written by the last of its priors, when he made his will and testament nearly four hundred years ago :

" In dei nomine, amen. The twentie day of Marche in the yere of o^{r} Lorde God a thousande fyve hundreth and fourtie, I Sr. John Lankastre otherwise cauled Sr. John Hill, priste, late pryor of the Monasterie of Sainte John baptiste of Launde in the countie of Leicester, by the grace of god of hole and parfitte memorie, but sicke in bodie, doo make my testament and last will in

manner and fourme following : ffurst I bequeth my soule to almightie god, to o^{r} Ladie sainte Marie, and to all the holie company of heavyn, and my bodie to be enchested and buried within the Chappell on the southe side of the Church of Newarke neare unto the tombe where my Lady Mary Hungerford and Sr. Richarde Sacheverell do lye, or in some other convenyent place nere unto the same where it shall please Master Deane of Newarke aforesaide to lymitt and appoynte."

Less euphonious is the bequest made by one Edward Watson, of Lidington, Co. Rutland, of 20*s*. to the prior and convent of Launde, among others : " To the intent that each houre may sing a dirge and masse for my soul, my father's and mother's, my Lord Smyth's, my Lord Atwater's, Mast. Willm. Smyth's and Robt. Tower's souls, all my children's souls, and for my brother Symon and Wm. Watson's souls."

From Launde Park Wood, which lies to the east of the park, and above the valley of the Chater where the drive from the present mansion slopes down to the stream, there is a distant view of Ridlington; while south of it is Loddington village, and beyond more woods and hills that only end with the turnpike between Leicester and Uppingham. Here, at Tugby Toll Bar, the Cottesmore may be seen at the southernmost limit of their Tuesday country. Beyond the road, like a barrier, are the woods round Keythorpe Hall.

On the glistening surface of the turnpike, scored by traffic, beneath the shadow of the trees, the hounds come padding along between the crowd, their flanks splashed with mud, but their sterns waving bravely in the dull November light. The hollow impact of hoofs on the macadam road echoes round the long procession of riders, only dying away as they turn down to the woods by Priest Hill Spinney or Loddington. For spectators on the road they are soon lost to sight. The note of a horn comes faintly from the woods. A mile away on the green slopes small dots of scarlet reappear; they seem to climb slowly up a long hill. And then they circle round again and vanish in another hollow. For hours they may be in the vicinity yet out of sight. Then a flock of sheep scattering and crowding together at last arrests the eye. The fox has passed that way.

Along the crest come the riders, tailing out against the sky; now confused among a line of trees, now clear upon the rolling slope of a treeless upland; hounds are running their hardest, yet over this great country the horsemen scarcely seem to move. One hill rises beyond another, and the little silhouettes sink down as though engulfed in the deep valleys of Tilton or Launde.

CHAPTER IV

TUESDAY COUNTRY (*continued*): OWSTON AND RANKSBOROUGH

"Just as Newmarket is recognised all the world over as the headquarters of the Turf, and, according to its thick-and-thin admirers, 'the only place to train a donkey in,' so in like manner does Leicestershire still stand out by itself amongst what Sam Weller, of immortal memory, was pleased to term the 'Fashionables,' as the only country fit for anyone worthy of the name of sportsman to hunt in."—JOHN MAUNSELL RICHARDSON.

THE field road from Marefield to Owston, which here forms the boundary between the Tuesday and Saturday countries, runs, except for three steep depressions, along a ridge parallel to the Somerby and Burrough ridge. Between the two ridges is a wide vale, where Newbold Lodge can be seen above the Twyford Brook before it reaches the viaduct. Just beneath Burrough village is a steep subsidiary vale, whence springs a tributary of the Twyford Brook. On this streamlet lies one of the most secluded coverts in Leicestershire—Peake's Covert (in Saturday country). It is a good example of a covert which bears the name of the man who planted it, and, if only for history's sake, an example that should be borne in mind by all those who rename coverts according to changes of ownership, or for any other reason.

South and west of Peake's Covert are the Tilton heights. The whole of this area consists of enormous grass fields, without a wood nearer than Owston, or a covert except that just named, Hames' Gorse, and John o' Gaunt in Quorn country. It is a fine rideable upland, with "bottoms" here and there, in addition to the thorn fences and occasional rails. Looking over four flights of these, into the eye of the sun, there is a last view of Tilton spire and John o' Gaunt. The rails cast long shadows over the grass, disappearing in a haze of light.

Turning eastward, the village of Owston is two miles from Marefield. While the clock of the old Priory Church of "Osulveston" strikes the hours, Owston seems to sleep, completely shut off from the world. The houses are nearly all old, some thatched, others roofed with corrugated red tiles, Colly-Weston tiles or Swithland slates. The village is overshadowed by the

Marefield hills, which hide it from the afternoon sun. The churchyard adds to the somewhat gloomy note of the place, with its heavy yew trees.

Knossington is on a ridge facing Owston; between them, a mile south of the road, is Owston Wood.

The road from Owston through Knossington Vale passes by one of Tom Noel's "swallow pits"—a sand-pit cut in the side of a little hill. It is a fastness for rabbits, which sun themselves at the entrances of holes that look out on to a sheer precipice—the sides of the pit are about twenty feet high. Little owls haunt the burrows, and, if they cannot be found here, we may see in similar pits the sand-martins or Noel's "swallows." On the south side of the road a stream runs west from Knossington Lake to join the Twyford Brook; on the north side, just below Owston Wood, the Gwash rises and flows down the valley to Braunston, crossing the Withcote road near Furze Hill.

Owston Wood has been described as the finest fox-covert in the world. It is certainly one of the largest. Its total length, including the Little Wood on the far side of the Withcote road, is one and three-quarter miles, and at its widest point it is five-eighths of a mile across. It is a remnant of the primeval forest, with a total area of three hundred acres.

The Saxon kingdom of Mercia was very thickly wooded, having only the basins of the rivers Trent, Soar, Wreake and Avon clear from forest, and Owston Wood, Launde Woods, and others in the district were undoubtedly part of the great Forest of Leighfield, which joined Sherwood and Charnwood Forests on the north and west. When the rest of Leighfield was disafforested, the big woods of the Cottesmore country were probably preserved by the squires of several of the estates as adjuncts to their property, possibly with a view to the scenic value of them. Before the disafforestation, some of these squires held lands by service of "finding dogs at their own cost for the destruction of wolves and foxes," as recorded of Thomas Eugarne, holding lands in Pytchley, Northants, in 1371, and similarly of Sir Robert Plumpton, who held one bovate of land in the county of Nottingham in 1433, by service of "fighting the wolves" in Sherwood Forest.

Considerable experience of the country and knowledge of the rides in the covert—often hock-deep in mud—alone qualify a man to get a good start when hounds run from Owston Wood. Luck may favour a few who do not deserve it, but Owston has no mercy for the novice. The wood can hold a strong scent, and when hounds fly through it to leave at the far end, they may be a mile away over the grass to Cold Overton or Somerby before members of the field who have been caught napping realise they are left in the lurch. And what a

OWSTON WOOD

country surrounds Owston Wood! Two miles north of it is the road from Burrough, through Somerby (in the Saturday country) to Ranksborough, the view on either side of which has been chosen by Major Burnaby in his Introduction as the finest in Leicestershire, to give a stranger his first impression of the famous grasslands.

East of Owston Wood, beyond Preston's Lodge, is Cheseldyne Coppice, marked on maps as Tampion's Coppice. Close by is the scene of a kill that ended a great run on December 5th, 1905, when Mr. Evan Hanbury was Master of the Cottesmore.

The run started from Priest Hill Spinney at 2.15. Hounds were running at the time, but divided in the spinney, sixteen and a half couples going on after what was probably the run fox, eleven and a half getting away with a large fox which Thatcher had seen in the covert. The whip stopped and brought on these to join the rest with Thatcher at Skeffington Gap. Here there was a brief check. Thence a steady holding pace to Rolleston Wood; then left-handed to Noseley, past Goadby to Keythorpe Wood and Ram's Head, and down to East Norton, where there was another check. Quickly hitting the line, hounds crossed the turnpike and railway and checked again for a few minutes beyond the Eye. They then pointed to Belton, but bore away instead left-handed to Loddington; thence short right-handed to the top of the Hog's Back, not far from Launde Park. They then sank the valley and raced up to King's Hill—the intermediate ridge—down into the valley beyond, over the Chater, and up the hill towards Prior's Coppice, where the fox, hard pressed, turned short left-handed on the top of the ridge for Owston Little Wood. This refuge he was unable to make, and was pulled down in the muddy lane near Cheseldyne Coppice. The time was one hour and thirty-five minutes.

From the brief check beyond East Norton the pace was exceedingly fast. On King's Hill as many as five horses were seen to fall at one fence, testifying to the severe call made on horses at this speed over a fine but challenging country. Thatcher, whose horse was used up before he got to the top of the Hog's Back, changed horses near East Norton with Mr. Evan Hanbury, the Master, whose horse was in little better state. Shortly afterwards, Thatcher's second horseman came up. The late Lord Annaly, the Master of the Pytchley, was equally fortunate, but it is doubtful if any other members of the field were able to change mounts at this critical moment.

It is interesting to recall that Charles II is said to have ridden across King's Hill after the Battle of Naseby, pursued by the Roundheads.

Cheseldyne Coppice lies on the western slope of the valley of the Gwash,

a field away from the road to Braunston. On the further slope is Lady Wood and Flitteris Park—so often mentioned in Noel's diary—and where the great fields range widely to the summit is Orton Park Wood, six hundred feet high, on the rolling down-like upland. On the western slope a familiar bridle-path leads to Leighfield Forest and Prior's Coppice. Old Sale Wood and Heycock's Spinney lie south-west, five miles away.

Braunston lies below the high ground, and beyond it is the Martinsthorpe ridge. A long straight road leads through the village and down into Rutland, having crossed the county boundary half a mile from Withcote. Braunston's thirteenth-century church contains the brasses of the Cheseldyne family. The once Royal Forest of Leighfield borders on the village—" King's Lodge " is marked on early maps of Rutland.

In the years before the War there were several old trees in this country—some few remain to-day—which were usually safe " finds " for foxes. Among these was one at Stapleford, and another at Whissendine ; while near Braunston a tall ivy-covered tree was often the centre of an expectant gathering—the field waiting in thrilling suspense, for as the fox jumped the run started. Sometimes the excitement was short-lived, the fox being promptly killed ; but if he was not too much shaken by his leap—from Braunston tree was a " high dive "—a good run would often follow. The circumstances of such a find were quite distinct from the incident of a tree'd fox, often depicted in sporting prints, when he has sought refuge aloft during a run—the foxes in question were known to lie-up in these old trunks.

From Braunston a road with wide grass margins and tangled hedges runs along a high ridge dividing the valleys of the Chater and the Gwash—the latter more often known as the Manton Brook—to four cross-ways, where a lane drops down to Brooke village. This little hamlet is only two miles from Oakham, but it might be fifty from anywhere. It lies in a hollow shut out from all but its immediate surroundings. In the church there is a tomb with much heraldic ornament, bearing an effigy of Charles, the second son of Sir Andrew Noel, who died in 1619. Like Braunston, the church has a square tower ; many of the valley churches in Leicestershire and Rutland have towers, while often those on hills have a spire, as if the value of such a landmark was in the minds of their builders.

A mile away, north of the village, lie Oakham Pastures, the start of the great Tixover run of Boxing Day, 1902. The hounds found at once and ran fast by Brooke, leaving Prior's Coppice on the right, Quaker's Gorse and Wardley Wood to Stoke End, where they checked. Running more slowly by Lydding-

ton, they crossed the Welland near Thorpe-by-Water, skirted Harringworth, and crossed the river again near the village. They passed Seaton on the left, and, hunting more slowly over Barrowden Heath, killed near Tixover. The time was two hours and twenty minutes, the distance about twenty-one miles.

Passing through Oakham we reach Barleythorpe, for so long the site of the Cottesmore kennels, but a pause must be made in the hall of Oakham Castle, unique on account of its horse-shoes.

NEAR UPPINGHAM.

James Wright, in his " History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland " (1684), gives the following account of the custom by which any Peer of the Realm on first entering Oakham had to give a shoe from the foot of one of his horses (or money for the purchase of a shoe in place of it) to be deposited in Oakham Castle. Many of those presented are large and elaborately engraved models of horse-shoes. James Wright says :

" The Lord of the Castle and Mannour of Okeham for the time being claims by prescription a Franchise or Royalty very rare and of singular note, viz., That the first time that any Peer of this Kingdom shall happen to pass

through the Precints of this Lordship, he shall forfeit as Homage a Shoe from the Horse whereon he rideth, unless he redeem it with mony. The true originale of which Custome I have not been able on my utmost endeavour to discover. But that such and time out of mind hath been the Usage appears by several Monumental Horseshoes (some gilded and of curious Workmanship) nail'd upon the Castle Hall Door."

He gives a list of shoes from Henry Lord Mordant, 1602, to John L. Bellasis, Bart., of Worleby, 1667, " with many others, some of later date and some more antient, whose inscriptions are now hardly legible." The earliest now in the hall, with the exception of one given by Queen Elizabeth, bears the date 1694, and was contributed by Baptist, Earl of Gainsborough. Queen Victoria and the Prince Regent are also represented.

Camden in his " Britannia " writes of the " crackt and decaying walls of an old Castle at Okeham, which Walkelin de Ferrariis built in the first times of the Norman Kings. And that it hath been the dwelling place of the Ferrars besides the credit of writers, and generall report, the great horse shoes which in time past that family gave in their armes fastned upon the gate, and in the hall may sufficiently prove."

In a paper on the custom read by the President of the Society of Antiquaries, Sir John Evans, before the Society some years ago (printed in " Leicestershire and Rutland Notes and Queries "), he remarks :

" The Ferrars family seem to have taken pride in their ' Farrier ' origin, and to have accepted the view set forth in the old rhyme :

> ' Whence cometh Smith, be he Knight, Lord or Squire,
> But from the Smith that forged in the fire.'

" Watchelin de Ferrars, the first who settled at Oakham, was a younger son of William de Ferrars, Earl of Derby, and held Okham by service of one knight's fee and a half, in 12 Henry II = 1166, or just a hundred years after the Conquest. It seems hardly probable that the custom commenced at so early a date, but its origin is veiled in obscurity."

Among the old records of the Cottesmore Hunt there is an account of a visit paid by the Queen's Staghounds to Barleythorpe in 1877 : " An event of an unusual character took place in this neighbourhood on Tuesday, April 10th, occasioned by a visit of the Queen's Staghounds to Barleythorpe Hall for a day's sport. The hounds with two stags arrived at Oakham Station on Monday afternoon and were at once taken to the kennels at Barleythorpe."

BRINGING UP THE STRAGGLERS: RANKSBOROUGH

A hunting breakfast was provided by Lord Lonsdale at the Hall, at which a large number of the nobility were entertained, and the meet took place in front of the Hall in the presence of a great crowd. The stag was uncarted at twelve o'clock, and a quarter of an hour later the hounds were laid on, in charge of Goodall, the Queen's huntsman. The line ran through Knossington, Launde Park Wood, Belton, Quaker's Lodge, Ayston, Uppingham Town and Glaston Gorse, as far as Morcott village, where the stag turned. He was taken on the top of a heap of large wall stones after two hours and forty minutes of very hard riding. The field numbered between seven hundred and a thousand riders, besides a great many people who followed in carriages. It must have been a great day for the towns-folk of Uppingham.

Leaving Barleythorpe for Langham, we are soon in sight of Ranksborough.

What Billesdon Coplow is to the Quorn, so is Ranksborough Gorse to the Cottesmore. Opinions may be divided as to whether it is the best of the Cottesmore coverts—most people would cite Owston Wood—but there can be no question of its precedence as the crowning glory of the Cottesmore in name, in historic associations, in the prominent and singular position which it occupies as a feature of the landscape. Its praises have also been sung in verse, like the epic of Billesdon Coplow, and there are some who will claim that Bromley Davenport's " Dream of an Old Meltonian " is the finest hunting poem in the language, while others will award that honour to " The Coplow Run." Its historic associations date back to the earliest history of the Hunt. " The source of Ranksborough's fame," writes Mr. Dale, " is first the care originally taken of it by the Noel family." " Ranksberry " figures time and again in Tom Noel's diary.

As a feature of the landscape Ranksborough, like the Coplow, is so strikingly placed that, although there are many higher hills in the Cottesmore country, it dominates its surroundings as they can never do. It has no rivals and stands alone.

Topographically, the hill which is crowned by Ranksborough Gorse is nearer akin to Hickling Standard than any other formation in the two counties (Ranksborough is on the Leicester-Rutland boundary), being a last offshoot of the high ground descending to a vale. The road from Langham to Cold Overton runs across open fields that slope down to the south and west limits of the Vale of Catmose ; they rise from a small brook to the tree-studded skyline—rough

grass fields, one covered with a thick growth of thorns. The road is mainly unfenced. Further on by the roadside is a field of plough, a dark hedge and trees hiding the view, and then, rising above them, Cold Overton, and further north the southern slope of Ranksborough Hill, facing Orton Park Wood, three-quarters of a mile away.

A white gate opens on the last lap to Cold Overton. The road running through the field here is rather stiffly fenced on either side, besides which, on sinking the slope from Orton Park Wood, there are presented three timber

GONE AWAY FROM ORTON PARK.

jumps at ten yard intervals—fine quick work, feasible enough, yet intricate enough to establish the elect. At the gateway a long narrow belt of spinney comes down the southern slope of Ranksborough Hill towards Orton Park. This is much-hunted ground. The spinney is a mile and three-quarters long. From some points of view the trees of this spinney seem to join with the Gorse on the top of the hill, but they are in reality separated by an open stretch of ground. No road approaches nearer than two fields from the hill itself, the Melton turnpike skirting it at this distance, and affording a clear view of the Gorse on its northern slope. On the Melton side the hill is partly screened by a thick belt of fir trees.

From the village of Cold Overton the Gorse is invisible, the side of the hill being a grass slope leading up to the trees of the spinney. Cold Overton Fish Ponds lie at the bottom of the slope, hidden by a belt of trees.

As Cold Overton is the last true hill village on the western limits of the Vale, so is Orton Park Wood the last of the great woods of the Tuesday country. Looking south from Ranksborough's summit the dark mass of this wood lies like a shadow on the fields. Everywhere around are acres of grass, leading eventually to the distant blue crest of Owston. The country has something of the aspect of the Wolds round Ranksborough, with steeper and more sudden valleys to the south. North of the hill, looking across the turnpike to Whissendine and Stapleford, are spread the famous pastures of the Saturday country, the country described in Bromley Davenport's poem, with which this chapter must end.

THE DREAM OF AN OLD MELTONIAN

I am old, I am old, and my eyes are grown weaker,
My beard is as white as the foam on the sea,
Yet pass me the bottle and fill me a beaker,
A bright brimming toast in a bumper for me!
Back, back, through long vistas of years I am wafted,
But the glow at my heart's undiminished in force;
Deep, deep in that heart has fond memory engrafted
Those quick thirty minutes from Ranksboro' Gorse.

What is time? The effluxion of life zoophitic
In dreary pursuit of position or gain.
What is life? The absorption of vapours mephitic,
And the burning of sunlight on senses and brain!
Such a life have I lived—though so speedily over,
Condensing the joys of a century's course,
From the find till we beat him near Woodwellhead Cover,
In thirty bright minutes from Ranksboro' Gorse.

Last night in St. Stephen's so wearily sitting
(The member for Boreham sustained the debate),
Some pitying spirit that round me was flitting
Vouchsafed a sweet vision my pains to abate.
The Mace, and the Speaker, and House disappearing,
The leather-clad bench is a thoroughbred horse;
'Tis the whimpering cry of the foxhound I'm hearing,
And my "seat" is a pigskin at Ranksboro' Gorse.

He's away! I can hear the identical holloa!
I can feel my young thoroughbred strain down the ride,
I can hear the dull thunder of hundreds that follow,
I can see my old comrades in life by my side.

Do I dream? All around me I see the dead riding,
And voices long silent re-echo with glee;
I can hear the far wail of the Master's vain chiding,
As vain as the Norseman's reproof to the sea.

Vain, indeed! for the bitches are racing before us—
Not a nose to the earth, not a stern in the air;
And we know by the notes of that modified chorus
How straight we must ride if we wish to be there!
With a crash o'er the turnpike, and onward I'm sailing,
Released from the throes of the blundering mass,
Which dispersed right and left as I topped the high railing,
And shaped my own course o'er the billowy grass.

Select is the circle in which I am moving,
Yet open and free the admission to all;
Still, still more select is that company proving,
Weeded out by the funker and thinned by the fall:
Yet here all are equal—no class legislation,
No privilege hinders, no family pride:
In the "image of war" show the pluck of the nation;
Ride, ancient patrician! democracy, ride!

Oh! gently, my young one; the fence we are nearing
Is leaning towards us—'tis hairy and black,
The binders are strong, and necessitate clearing,
Or the wide ditch beyond will find room for your back.
Well saved! we are over! now far down the pastures
Of Ashwell the willows betoken the line,
Of the dull-flowing stream of historic disasters
We must face, my bold young one, the dread Whissendine.

No shallow-dug pan with a hurdle to screen it,
That cocktail imposture, the steeplechase brook:
But the steep broken banks tell us plain, if we mean it,
The less we shall like it the longer we look.
Then steady, my young one, my place I've selected,
Above the dwarf willow, 'tis sound I'll be bail,
With your muscular quarters beneath you collected
Prepare for a rush like the "limited mail."

Oh! now let me know the full worth of your breeding;
Brave son of Belzoni, be true to your sires,
Sustain old traditions—remember you're leading
The cream of the cream in the shire of the shires!
With a quick, shortened stride as the distance you measure
With a crack of the nostril and cock of the ear,
And a rocketing bound, and we're over, my treasure,
Twice nine feet of water, and landed all clear.

What! four of us only? Are these the survivors
Of all that rode gaily from Ranksboro' ridge?
I hear the faint splash of a few hardy divers,
The rest are in hopeless research of a bridge;

Væ Victis! the way of the world and the winners!
Do we ne'er ride away from a friend in distress?
Alas! we are anti-Samaritan sinners,
And streaming past Stapleford, onward we press.

Ah! don't they mean mischief, the merciless ladies?
What fox can escape such implacable foes?
Of the sex cruel slaughter for ever the trade is,
Whether human or animal—YONDER HE GOES!
Never more for the woodland! his purpose has failed him,
Though to gain the old shelter he gallantly tries;
In vain the last double, for Jezebel's nailed him!
WHO-WHOOP! in the open the veteran dies!

Yes, four of us only! But is it a vision?
Dear lost ones, how come ye with mortals to mix?
Methought that ye hunted the pastures Elysian,
And between us there rolled the unjumpable Styx!
Stay, stay but a moment! the grass fields are fading,
And heavy obscurity palsies my brain:
Through what country, what ploughs and what sloughs am I wading?
Alas! 'tis the member for Boreham again!

Oh! glory of youth! consolation of age!
Sublimest of ecstasies under the sun;
Though the veteran may linger too long on the stage,
Yet he'll drink a last toast to a fox-hunting run.
And oh! young descendants of ancient top-sawyers!
By your lives to the world their example enforce;
Whether landlords, or parsons, or statesmen, or lawyers,
Ride straight as they rode it from Ranksboro' Gorse.

Though a rough-riding world may bespatter your breeches,
Though sorrow may cross you or slander revile,
Though you plunge overhead in misfortune's blind ditches,
Shun the gap of deception, the handgate of guile:
Oh, avoid them! for there see the crowd is contending;
Ignoble the object—ill-mannered the throng;
Shun the miry lane, falsehood, with turns never ending,
Ride straight for truth's timber, no matter how strong.

I'll pound you safe over! sit steady and quiet,
Along the sound headland of honesty steer;
Beware of false holloas and juvenile riot:
Though the oxer of duty be wide, never fear!
And when the run's over of earthly existence,
And you get safe to ground, you will feel no remorse,
If you ride it—no matter what line or what distance—
As straight as your fathers from Ranksboro' Gorse.

CHAPTER V

SATURDAY COUNTRY

"There's your country! Not a bad jump that Whissendine there; get a little lower down and it's all one, like a navigation. I never seem to have been out of that brook. What fun I've seen in brooks!"—DICK CHRISTIAN.

THE Saturday country of the Cottesmore on the Melton side is one of the most satisfying in the world. Moreover, it is bounded by country equally good on every quarter. If hounds run east, there is the Thursday country at its best; if south, we may traverse the ranging grass of the Tuesday country; if bounds are broken altogether, there is a gallop over the best country of the Belvoir in the north, or the Friday Quorn on the west.

The hunting quality of the country is varied, including Ranksborough (as a neutral draw with the Tuesday country), the wonderful grasslands on either side of the road through Cold Overton and Somerby to Burrough, and the heights of Burrough Hill itself, as well as such galloping country as the Burton Flats, with their ugly ditches and at times heavy going, the pastures round Stapleford and the terrors of the Whissendine.

We will take the high country first.

Peake's Covert has already been mentioned, visible from the south-west near Marefield. From Burrough one could almost drop a stone on to it where it lies completely hidden in a precipitous vale. It is a sporting little place, as steep to climb out of as it is easy to reach when descending the hill.

After leaving Burrough village for Somerby, just beyond Somerby House there is a field-road barred by a gate—here is the gateway to the Cottesmore highlands. Once through the gate, a wide grass slope leads to the little crest where the road cuts through for Owston Wood, two miles away. From this point up to Pickwell is an elongated table-land of about five hundred and fifty feet, with hills rising on either side some fifty feet higher, with one spur towards Knossington loftier than the rest. A branch of the table-land lies east of Pickwell, below the high ground of Cold Overton.

Pickwell stands at the northern limit of the plateau, on ironstone, where wheat grows in the tawny soil covering the rock. The beautiful little church

has a fine tower, but its clock, for all those who pass to Melton, is provokingly difficult to see. Most of the old cottages are built of ironstone, some thatched, others tiled. The eastern end of the village street lies beneath the swell of Pickwell Big Field, which carries the road through a series of gates to the "Noel Arms." Years ago this building ceased to be a tavern and became a farm-house; its three stories, each with high square-cut windows, are topped by a narrow roof of old Swithland slates.

From the "Noel Arms" it is about a mile across country to Leesthorpe Hall, and rather more to the Punch Bowl. The latter is always a surprise to those who gallop along the high ridge from Burrough Wood; it lies so deeply hidden in its hollow. Larch, Scotch fir and elder, growing close together, cling precariously to the slopes which they conceal. On being disturbed, hordes of rabbits can be seen racing for its shelter from the thistle-covered hillside. The Punch Bowl is on the escarpment, and the flanks of the hill are precipitous. Yet it is wonderful how cleverly and quickly Leicestershire horses will let themselves down these steep banks.

The view from the Punch Bowl discloses Wheathill Spinney amidst fields of ridge and furrow, facing the village of Little Dalby. It is a stirring start from the spinney when it holds a fox—as stirring as the initial scamper across the eighty-acre field from Leesthorpe Hall, when many a round back and switching tail, stimulated perhaps by a biting wind, creates dismay. The hill on which Wheathill Spinney is set drops down to the Pickwell road, which follows the vale extending from Burrough Wood and the Punch Bowl in a north-easterly direction towards the Burton Flats. The Punch Bowl is the last of the Cottesmore heights in the west.

Across the vale, due south, is Little Dalby Hall, a fine Elizabethan house, restored and enlarged, standing out clearly among its trees. The Hall has been for centuries the residence of the Hartopp family. The church with its tall spire was partly rebuilt in 1852; it contains some beautiful stained glass and fine carving.

Gunn's Lodge is due west of Little Dalby. South of this farm-house the Cottesmore boundary, which runs west from the railway near Marefield to John o' Gaunt Station, along a tributary of the Twyford Brook, and then round Salter's Hill, now runs south-west to Burrough Hill. Thence along the east side of Sir Francis Burdett's Covert and the Lake Spinney to a point a quarter of a mile east of Bunny's Lodge; then back to the lane that leads from Gartree Hill, and so straight to Melton.

From the road along the Little Dalby Woodlands a curious picture can often

be seen of a whole hunt in silhouette along the edge of the Punch Bowl, for all the world as if the little figures were cut out of paper. Hounds give tongue on the northern slopes, yet the figures on the skyline hesitate to abandon their point of vantage. But hounds are about to launch into the vale. There is a halloa from the road, as a fox slips into the Little Dalby Woods, and the Punch Bowl ridge is left stark and empty. The field are descending the hill and soon appear upon the road. Under the tall trees the scarlet coats become dull and sombre, dark reflections on the wet road-surface are broken by a splashing of water, or with a clatter of hoofs the road empties rapidly and the crowd of horsemen disappear round the shoulder of the hill.

For a certain stern grandeur there is no landscape finer than that seen from the summit of the Punch Bowl on a late autumn evening. The white steam of trains shines fitfully in a melancholy light diffused over the Belvoir country; the atmosphere is charged with moisture; the woods and isolated groups of trees look black, a metallic sheen sweeping over them caused by the fusion of all definite forms in the blur of a rain-storm. A low moaning as the wind rises, blowing from the sea across the far-off vale, forms an accompaniment to a more strident sound; whether this is the echo of a tune played by the wind on the distant wires following the railway, or the cumulative effect of the passage through the air of myriads of falling leaves, unseen, but each adding its minute quota to the whole gamut of sound, the effect is weird in the extreme. Perhaps the darkening landscape listens while the three famous witches of Belvoir, having finished their unhappy careers upon earth, soar aloft with the speed of bats and look down upon the scene of their former machinations.

However one may account for an eerie sensation produced by the sights and sounds of this particular landscape at this season of the year, the note of elegy inseparable from the season of fast-falling leaves makes this a fitting occasion to pay tribute to a great huntsman of the Cottesmore—not a name already blazoned upon the roll of famous huntsmen, but one which should be there. Tom Isaac, a son of Thomas Isaac (usually known as Charles), who was huntsman to the Fernie for nineteen years, came from the Blankney with a great reputation. He hunted the Cottesmore for one and a half seasons (1911–12), when he resigned through ill-health. Tom Isaac died on January 30th, 1913. This brilliant young huntsman showed wonderful sport. In the kennel he had no superior; in the field he had all the attributes of a great huntsman: a sure instinct for the ways of a fox, which seldom failed, and the confidence born of genius; moreover, he was a fine horseman. In his death the Cottesmore suffered a great loss, though the horn has been ably carried since by Norman,

BURTON FLATS FROM CUCKOO HILL

Leaf, and the present huntsman, James Welch, who has shown excellent sport during the last few seasons.

Leesthorpe Hill, which used to test the cars of years ago, drops steeply to Wild's Lodge at the famous four cross-ways on the Melton turnpike. Wild's Lodge is the only Cottesmore fixture, with the exception of Stapleford Park, actually in the Burton Flats. The farm-house is a reminder of old Leicestershire, simple and dignified in architecture, in harmony with the atmosphere of the countryside. Close to Wild's Lodge is Wild's Spinney, and just east of it, Berry Gorse.

Berry Gorse is one of the Cottesmore's great possessions. There is little

WYMONDHAM.

gorse, but the covert is full of trees (where kestrels nest) and nearly always holds a fox. On its western side is the Melton race-course and the village of Burton Lazars. The latter once contained the principal Lazar House, or Leper Hospital, in England, founded in 1135. No trace of this is left, and even the mineral spring itself has disappeared. In the village there are some fine old farm-houses of ironstone or brick, mellow with age, roofed with the time-worn grey, green or purple of old Swithland slates. From Burton village may be seen the Flats of the Eye stretching to the Belvoir country and the railway on the north; on the east to Stapleford, where the ground rises again to the Thursday country; and south-east to Laxton's Covert, where the steep road to Jericho and Leesthorpe runs along the skyline over Cuckoo Hill.

In this great basin of the Flats there are plenty of rails to be jumped, and deep ditches. The Burton Brook flows through the low meadows, besides the river Eye. Before the brook crosses the Melton road and the race-course (of which it used to be the water jump) it flows past the Burton Spinneys, close to the Quorn boundary. Close to the junction of the brook, and a few other small streams that percolate through the Flats, with the Eye, Burbidge's Covert on the far bank of the river forms a Belvoir salient in Cottesmore territory. East of Burbidge's is Long Spinney. The lane to Stapleford winds along over the Flats, past several fields of plough, two small spinneys, and also the ruins of Felsted's Spinney, cut down during the War.

Stapleford Hall, once the ancient seat of the Sherards, Earls of Harborough, is now the residence of Colonel John Gretton, M.P. Nowhere in the Melton district is there a finer setting for a meet of hounds. The house of grey stone is surrounded by woodland. Near the centre of the park is a lake on which are Canadian geese, and in hard weather many varieties of duck—it is the only extensive sheet of water in the district. Beyond the lake is Cottage Plantation, usually a safe find. Here also is the Stapleford tree, which, like that near Braunston, used often to hold a fox.

Close by the four cross-ways near Stapleford, another lane runs through the Flats, over the Eye, and the level crossing at Wyfordby. There are willow trees dotted over the meadows, which are often flooded in winter, and the air is full of the cries of peewits and golden plover. Mallard and teal rise from the sedge, and a heron may often be seen standing above its reflection in the glassy water.

The river is here the Belvoir boundary, from Melton as far as Stapleford Park, after which it follows the southern boundaries of the parishes of Saxby, Garthorpe, Coston, and Buckminster. A short distance beyond the railway bridge at Saxby a road to Wymondham turns due east, crossing the Eye (called in Belvoir territory the Coston Brook) and then traversing a wold-like country of great grass fields. One mile south-west of the road is the famous covert of Wymondham Roughs, on a tributary of the Eye.

And now, reader, lest the " member for Boreham " should intrude among these pages, we will have a change—you shall finish this chapter in the saddle.

If you are musical, you may remember one of Haydn's symphonies—it is called " The Surprise "—where the whole orchestra, strings, brass and drums, responds to a wave of the conductor's baton, and comes in with a crash, lifting the music from its quiet meandering, and incidentally each member of the audience from his seat. The seat from which you were very nearly lifted a second ago is Davenport's " pigskin " (over that nasty fence soon after the ford

by Wymondham Roughs); but your horse has recovered himself. We are going strong up the slope for Edmondthorpe with half five hundred racing steeds behind us.

The morning has been wild—the sunlight chased away by leaden clouds—and there was a bitter wind sweeping along the broad street of Wymondham. It was good to be down in the vale by the Roughs; it was better still to be one of the first dozen through the gate and over the ford when he went away.

TEIGH.

We are blowing a bit up this last stretch, and there is a black-looking place in front. Ease down for a stride or two, and with eyes watering from the keen blast, glance round to note direction. We "drink the wind of our own speed," as the poet says, and the glance must be a hurried one. Beyond the rising fields are the trees of Teigh, just breaking the skyline to the left; Woodwell Head rears its sombre crest from the blue distance of the Thursday country. That black place looks blacker—now take a pull. The landscape dips and rises to meet us, and branches crack as we take the drop. Taut reins jerk us forward, but balance saves us in that moment of precarious poise.

There is a scramble and all is well. Hark to them now, and see them! The view is open in front, the land slopes down to the vale. Woodwell Head and Teigh vanish as we swing round to the right. The fields race past, the fences come and go, the whole hunt streaming over the grass for Whissendine. Hounds are a field ahead, a gleam of sun picks them out sharply upon the green as they sweep up a rise of ground. There are three scarlet backs in front, three switching tails and heaving quarters—press as we may, we cannot catch them up. The wind begins to sing, the rough meadow grass flies below us like the lines on green watered silk. Our good animal shakes his ears and settles down. The rhythm of his hoof-beats throbs in the brain as we measure the distance before each leap, time it to a nicety, and fence after fence is left behind us.

That field of two hundred and fifty has been thinned out a bit. Some twenty or thirty race on either side—one less now, that was a nasty one and his horse has gone—while a hundred more come up as best they can. Away back to Edmondthorpe each field has its touch of scarlet—stragglers delayed by one cause or another. We cannot see them but we know they are there. For us there is a different sight. The tower of Whissendine Church gives us our bearings, but before we reach it we must cross the brook.

Faster and faster go the hounds, and faster and faster as we follow—horses on either side extended in the full glory of the gallop—come the intervening fences. High in air fly turf sods torn from the meadow and thorn twigs brushed from the hedge. We have a vision close at hand of an empty saddle and a floundering horse, its rider picking himself up ten yards away. Then comes the brook. Let your horse go, and you will see the end! Taken at full gallop the Whissendine need have no terrors for you. Some may have funked it, some may have taken the road; but that whistling of the wind in your ears, that flash of water below you, that triumphant feeling as a splash arose on either side, was worth the risk of a ducking. Two of them are in—there is no time to watch them crawl out—and we race down the long slope towards Jericho Lodge or Laxton's. The pace is beginning to tell and the fox to tire. It looks as if he may cross the road and break his journey in Whissenthorpe Spinneys. Whissendine Mill cuts the skyline on the left, below us is Browne's Lodge; Whissenthorpe—the house, fields and plantation—lies before us, spread out like a map. Hounds are over the road and racing past the lodge. There is a sudden chorus—he will break his journey for good before reaching the plantation.

The last field surges past, a jump and a scramble, and the lodge gates greet

us. The lodge gates, and a little crowd collecting within on the rough grass by the drive. The first lap is over. Dismount, reader, and stretch your legs!

Hounds are waiting in the long grass beside the covert, their brief period of excitement at an end. The leaders of the hunt are grouped together between the plantation and the drive: the Master on his grey, the huntsman on his

THE WHISSENDINE.

brown; a tall lady wearing glasses (one of the first up at the finish); a girl riding astride with a round hat and pigtail down her back (there are few fences can stop her), and a score more in the first flight. Later arrivals increase the crowd with every minute.

There is a pause while steaming horses are changed—by those who are fortunate enough to have second mounts at hand—and the pines of the plantation form a background to a cheerful and well-pleased assembly.

At length those who are gathered on the drive move to one side; James

Welch and his hounds trot through the lodge gates, cross the road, and ascend the green rise of the opposite meadow. The order is for Laxton's.

This covert lies at the south-western end of Stapleford Park, separated from it by the road running round two sides of the park, from which branch off the lane to Lower Leesthorpe and the road to Whissendine. Laxton's Covert is in the apex of the angle formed by this lane and road. We enter the sloping field on its eastern side, assembling by the edge of the wood. Glancing back, the trees of Stapleford Park can be seen flanking the road that leads down a gradual fall of ground to Whissendine Station and Wymondham. In front, below the southern end of the covert, is the long valley through which flows the Leesthorpe Brook, to join the Whissendine; the stream is crossed by the straight road to Whissendine village, which ascends the opposite hill.

There is not much time to observe the landscape, for hounds are out at the lower end of the covert, and away we go. Hold your horse here—there are some tricky fences among the marshy fields by the brook. These and the brook—which though not very formidable itself has an ugly rail—are safely left behind, as to the sound of splashing through the water-logged fields the vale is crossed. While ascending the hill, Whissendine's splendid church tower comes gradually into view again, and the mill, long bereft of its sails. Hounds check just beyond the village, through which pours the concourse of the hunt.

From Whissendine the grass track known as Teigh Lane leads to this village—in places hock-deep in mud. As hounds appear to be running on again over the table-land, this lane gradually fills, many of the field making towards Teigh.

But the fox has found shelter in Whissendine Osiers and is eventually chopped after running a series of rings. Some hours are spent in the vicinity of the Osiers, until later in the day a fox goes away straight for the Thursday country. He turns right for Ashwell Spinney and the broad fields descending from the high ground on which it stands to the brook below; but he leaves it on one side, perhaps with visions of Woodwell Head, steering for the old canal and Market Overton.

The Oakham Canal commenced at Melton, as a continuation of the rivers Wreake and Eye, which were canalised, and there are traces of its derelict course—still marked on the Ordnance Map—in several places, the longest section being east of the road from Teigh to Ashwell. It survives also in such names as Gatehouse Bridge, near the kennels, and Turnover Bridge, where the towing path crossed from one side of the canal to the other.

Galloping along the plough towards the canal, we cross the eastern boundary of the Saturday country, which runs from Edmondthorpe through Ashwell to Langham. We are not to raid Thursday country to-day, however; the fox has turned left past the little village of Teigh, and heads down the slope for Stapleford. The hunt has tailed out, and we negotiate the narrow hand-gate leading to another section of the old canal, descending and ascending the banks

THE LEESTHORPE BROOK BELOW LAXTON'S COVERT.

without undue haste, steep and muddy as they are. How differently does a crowded field pressing up the slope from Wymondham Roughs approach this hindrance at the start! But a real test is ahead—that portion of the Whissendine which lies beyond the railway. The brook flows from its source below Cold Overton to Rocart's Spinney and Whissendine Osiers, and so to Whissendine Station; between the station and the village there are places where it offers a perfect water jump at the gallop. What we are now approaching is a different matter. The stream may be crossed at the ford (or elsewhere if there

is time to search for a suitable place and observation to detect it), or it may be jumped. Its muddy waters have separated many a man and horse. There is an occasion on record when the perfect second-horseman was ready on the further bank; having witnessed the common catastrophe, he mounted his master on his second horse and remained behind himself to get the first out of the brook.

No such friendly figure awaits the victim of immersion to-day. Hounds are over and racing for Stapleford. There are scarlet coats on right and left, and they are racing too. The water shines in the opalescent evening light which has succeeded a day of cloud. The bank approaches. A few willows rise up and face us as they draw rapidly nearer. The impetus of the rush carries us on. The wind whistles; coat-tails fly back as if someone pulled them from behind; the neck and shoulders of our good mount are straight as an arrow for the stream. A white scud of foam flies past as he gives his head a last shake. And then—we're over. That left rein *did* catch round the horse's ear; that stirrup-iron *was* very nearly lost; we are not quite certain, but suspect that the toe of our right boot has left a scar upon the bank; and there was a heavy splash as earth and grass tussocks crumbled away. But we're over.

A riderless horse—saddle and flanks streaming down with muddy water—has crossed our front and come to a stand. We glance back—it is all right, his rider has him. And now for Stapleford. Others have jumped the brook, two ladies among them; a score or so are coming from the ford, another score along the station road. All who have crossed the brook ride over the last few fields as if their hearts were lightened. The trees of the park darken a sulphurous sky; a pale aureola seems to ring the heavens, its rays fading overhead in a misty blue. A dank wind blows over the trees, and the rich scent of the earth is borne on its cool gusts. There is a wild riot of colour for a short space overhead conflicting among the clouds, a riot of sound for a moment in the woods below. But they have lost him.

Twilight comes, and the end of the hunt.

By way of postscript, this chapter must conclude with a glance at the far Saturday country, though being entirely in Rutland it is really beyond the scope of the book. Hunted on alternate Saturdays, the country round Uppingham

WARDLEY WOOD

boasts few coverts, and grass by the mile divides them. The district is intersected by the two brooks, the Chater and the Eye, ever becoming wider and deeper. From the banks of the Chater there is a steep climb of two or three miles to Ridlington. Endlessly long does the straight and hilly road seem to a tired man and horse destined for Melton after a day in the Uppingham country.

Seen from the top of the hill is Martinsthorpe, where stone walls test the versatility of hunters.

The desecrated chapel, which was dedicated to St. Martin, is now in a state of ruin and has long been used as a barn. It is a familiar landmark as a guide to Manton Gorse—the hope of many a Saturday afternoon. Above the Gorse is Gunthorpe, set among its trees. The notable covert of Lax Hill, in the Monday country, is conspicuous across the turnpike. Further yet are the Burley and adjoining woodlands. At Ridlington the Northampton sands produce a rich red soil, which tells of iron, and grass gives way to crops. In the valleys are the clays, and pastures appear again.

Close to Preston, whose spire is visible, is an old wooden windmill. A road bears south-east to Ayston, a village of ironstone cottages, thatched, or roofed with Colley-Weston tiles, with a fine old church. Seen in the evening sun, the ironstone walls of the Hall and cottages glow like rich old gold among their tall beech trees. Ayston Spinney lies half a mile north-east from the village. The road joins the turnpike from Uppingham, which runs due west on a high ridge. On the north side a tributary of the Eye runs far below the road. The ground climbs from the stream to Ridlington Park Farm and Quaker's Spinney, whence the ridge that runs to Launde Park is known as the Hog's Back. One mile west is Belton village, where hounds meet at the end of the season to draw Allexton Wood in the Fernie country. This wood is neutral to both Hunts.

But the crown of the far Saturday country is Wardley Wood, situated on the banks of the Eye, on the southern side of the turnpike. The broad rides in this wood—one descending the hill from the fields near the turnpike, and the other running along its more level stretches—give it a stately character; from the higher ride there is a fine view of the covert itself and the hillside beyond, where the Stoke Woods lie along the crest. Wardley Wood is a great stronghold of Cottesmore foxes.

Nearly four miles away to the north-east is the isolated little covert of Glaston Gorse, lying, like Grimstone Gorse, close up against the railway. In Cottesmore country, places so named are really gorse coverts; they have not

been superseded (as is the case with so many of the Quorn "Gorses") by other growth, while retaining their old names.

Wardley Wood is the south-west fortress of the grass countries of the Cottesmore—many a time have its rides echoed to the sound of horn and halloa when a stout fox has left its shelter for Owston, and, if he has been a really stout fox, raced on from Owston to Whissendine.

PART IV

THE BELVOIR

CHAPTER I

WEDNESDAY COUNTRY

"Melton Spinney's to our left on the hill, you can only see the trees. They're never done getting good runs from it."—DICK CHRISTIAN.

THE southern boundaries of the Belvoir Wednesday country—the fourth and last of the great hunting countries immediately adjoining Melton—are the river Eye, and the southern boundaries of the parishes of Saxby, Garthorpe, Coston, and Buckminster. The northern boundary is the road which runs from the turnpike nearly a mile north of Abb-Kettleby, north of Holwell, to Eastwell, Eaton, Branston, and Croxton Kerrial, where it joins the Grantham turnpike, thence the road to Three Queens. Here, from the four cross-ways, the eastern boundary follows Sewstern Lane.

It will be recalled that the Old Salt Way is supposed to have entered Leicestershire at Croxton Kerrial, and the northern boundary described coincides with its course from the Melton turnpike, just south of Holwell Mouth, as far as Mawbrook Lodge. After this for a few miles the course of the Salt Way is uncertain; in any case the boundary leaves it and follows the somewhat circuitous route through the villages named.

The boundary on the west is the turnpike dividing the territory of the Belvoir and the Quorn.

Under the present regime the Wednesday country includes the coverts of Holwell Mouth and Clawson Thorns, so that from the turnpike the northern boundary now lies just half a mile north of the Salt Way.

Leaving Melton by the road which runs through the village of Thorpe Arnold to Waltham-on-the-Wolds and Grantham, we are back in the familiar Wold scenery. A great part of the Wednesday country covers the high ground south of the Belvoir Vale—the eastern wing of the Wolds escarpment. There is no finer view in Leicestershire, for those who admire the contours of this rather bleak country, than that obtained from the Waltham road, looking west across the valley down which runs a tributary of the Eye to the ridge crowned by

Melton Spinney. This landscape is even more spacious than those typical of the Wolds in Quorn country. The plateau, along which runs the main road, is continuous as far as Waltham, without those undulations that in places mark the course of the Fosse Way; and the level extent of this wind-swept ridge and road stretching apparently into illimitable distance, with slopes descending from it to the valleys on either side, gives a distinctive character to this part of Belvoir country.

Melton Spinney, here seen in silhouette on the skyline of the parallel ridge, descends on the far side to the railway and the Scalford Brook. To approach the spinney by road it is necessary to return and descend the steep hill from Thorpe Arnold on the way to Melton. A field-road branching off to the right leads along the second ridge direct to the covert.

This famous spinney—famous not only in the annals of the Belvoir Hunt, but in the history of Melton from its earliest records—slopes down to the Scalford Vale. Where once only the brook barred the way, the joint line of the Great Northern and London and North-Western Railway now scars the valley. Beyond the lower end of the spinney there is an archway in the railway embankment through which runs a grass track, the only egress from the immediate vicinity of the covert to the opposite hillside. Melton Spinney has seen the start or finish of so many great runs that it is difficult to single out those that merit description. Whether the fox breaks away in the direction of Scalford Hall, perhaps eventually crossing the turnpike into Quorn country, thereby leading the field downhill past the spinney and through the railway arch to the stiffly fenced country round the Scalford road, or, descending the opposite valley and crossing the Waltham road, makes for Freeby Wood or Stapleford, there is every chance of a run that will live in history.

Perhaps the most famous chase recorded from this covert is that which took place on January 15th, 1851, when the fox ran a ring and saved himself by eventually reaching his starting-point. The run is thus described in the old records of the Belvoir Hunt:

"Found in Melton Spinney, crossed the Grantham road beyond Thorpe Pasture, went between Stonesby Gorse and Stonesby, and over Croxton Park, to the grove of large trees on the Belvoir side of the park; here the hounds stopped and bayed at the foot of a large oak tree. After some time the fox was discovered fifty or sixty feet up in the tree, endeavouring to conceal himself; he would not move till the whipper-in climbed the tree and poked him from behind, when he came away leisurely down the stem, which grew in a slanting direction, and away he went. The hounds, which had been taken to a short

MELTON SPINNEY FROM THE WALTHAM ROAD

distance off, set off within one hundred and fifty yards of him, and ran him at nose-end through Bescaby Oaks, away at the Saltby corner, and bearing to the right past Stonesby, left Sproxton Thorns to the left, and went by Saxby to Stapleford Park. This was six miles as the crow flies, up wind, and the fox for the last mile and a half in the same field as the hounds; he here turned to the right, and coming out of the park, the hounds ran him at a decreased pace to Melton Spinney, whence they went away with a fresh fox, and this gallant fellow saved his life. Great distress among the horses. Sir T. Whichcote had about the best of it. The above scene of the fox in the tree was some years after modelled in silver, with equestrian figures of the present Duke of Rutland, Sir T. Whichcote, Mr. Litchford Goodall, and two hounds, and presented to Lord Forester by the gentlemen of the Belvoir Hunt on his marriage."

We cannot do better than follow the line taken by this fox in order to explore the adjacent Belvoir country, though it will be necessary to diverge from his route to coverts in the vicinity.

Immediately after crossing the Waltham road is Brentingby Wood, by the side of a lane which eventually leads to the Saxby road and Brentingby village. Thorpe Lodge is south-west of it, Glebe Lodge to the north. Between Brentingby Wood and the road to Freeby are Brentingby Spinneys and the New Planting. These three coverts (separated from Freeby Wood and its annexe, Waltham Thorns, by fields of moderate size, mainly grass with occasional plough) are composed of forest trees with undergrowth, like Freeby Wood itself. Waltham Thorns, as its name implies, is different in character.

The road from Freeby village gradually converges on that from Brentingby, the distance between them when Freeby Wood is reached being barely half a mile. The great wood, with its shaded rides, its bracken and pine trees, has the appearance of an ancient forest. In actual area it compares with Owston Little Wood or Laxton's Covert, but once within its sombre precincts its comparatively small size is forgotten. For woodland scenery it has few rivals in Leicestershire. Waltham Thorns is separated from and north of the main wood. Beyond the Thorns a lane runs to Waltham Pastures Farm, while a grass track leads to the Waltham and Wymondham road. A field away from the road is Waltham Ashes, placed on the hillside above a small tributary of the Eye. Due east, nearly five miles away, is Buckminster, and south-west, rising above the rolling contours beyond the Eye, is Burrough Hill. All this district north of the river is singularly remote, with hardly a house in sight until Waltham and Stonesby are reached. The tall trees of Stonesby Spinney can be seen a field away from the Wymondham road, while approaching the village the fields

become steeper in pitch and smaller in size. On the left hand, half a mile north-west, lies Stonesby Gorse.

Very distinctive are the villages of the Waltham country; their characteristics are those of Lincolnshire villages. The county boundary is barely five miles away. Stonesby is typical of most of these Wold hamlets. The walls bounding the road and nearly all the houses are built of limestone; the roofs of the houses being corrugated red tiles. Many stone farm-houses and buildings are in the village, outlying farms being few and far between, as in the Wolds of Quorn country. These farms have their rows of golden stacks which give variety to the streets, and each village also has its grey, generally square-towered, church.

It is little over a mile from Stonesby to Waltham, almost a small town of the Wolds, that boasts a mill whose sails revolve with a dull creaking sound—a rare sight to-day—and until recently held a horse and cattle fair. "Waltham Fair" was last held three years ago, as an old man related, standing beneath the swinging sails of the mill, and he could remember strings of a hundred and fifty horses going to the fair, where as many as six or seven hundred would be assembled. There were also droves of Welsh and Irish ponies. For thirty-eight years he had been at the mill, but times had changed and the horse fair had been gradually killed by the various sales of horses in Melton.

From Waltham we come to Croxton Park, where a road branching from the turnpike and running to the right of the park, past the race-course, leads by Bescaby Oaks, a quarter of a mile away.

Of this famous covert Mr. Dale gives a picture in "Fox-Hunting in the Shires":

"Bescaby Oaks is the first covert to be drawn. The field follow till they are packed in a muddy green lane where they can do little mischief and whence many of them will find it hard to disentangle themselves. But we have edged as near the gate on the right as may be. The leaves are still on the trees, gold, scarlet and brown, and there is that indescribable scent of hunting in the air that stirs us with the associations of past pleasures of the chase. There is a cheer from the huntsman, a crack of the thong of a whipper-in, then a note from a hound which silences the chatter in the lane and brings everyone to attention. Then arises a tumult of hound voices which sinks into silence and swells out again. The clamour divides and tells us there are two lines, and then a shrill voice sounds from the far side of the covert. Those nearest the gate dash through, up one side and down to the left, half the horses out of hand with excitement; but there is no time to lose, for the fox is away and the Belvoir hounds are already striving forward. With inconceivable rapidity they flit

through the undergrowth, and, by the time the first men are through the gate and out of the covert, the whole pack has tumbled out of the wood, spread wide for the scent, hit off the line, and are streaming away with a rippling, chiming cry. . . ."

EVENING, CROXTON LAKE.

A little further on, when the fox has found refuge in a small covert unnamed, we have the following from the same writer :

" But in this small square covert of thorns the fox, being young and inexperienced, has waited, and that pause has sealed his fate, for this time hounds and fox come out almost together, and it is a race for life for the fox and a steeplechase for the followers for the next two miles till the hounds fairly run into him in the open. A Belvoir burst of twenty minutes of the best ! So the

day, with perhaps another burst, or it may be a long steady hunt, goes on. If you stay to the end, when the hounds turn away for the kennels at the end of the day, you will see that they will trot off as gaily as they started in the morning. The Master, the servants, and the much-diminished field will have tired out two horses apiece, but courage and condition will apparently leave the hounds as willing and able to hunt when the shadows of the short November twilight put a stop to the sport as when they left their kennels in the morning.

" Now this pack you have watched and followed with so much interest and pleasure is the result of at least a hundred years of selection, judgment and thought. There are fifty or sixty couples in kennels and as many puppies are sent out to walk, of whom not a third will be found worthy of a trial in the pack and fewer still of a permanent place on the hound list. The first definite knowledge we have of the Belvoir hounds is in 1727, in the days of the third Duke of Rutland."

The third Duke succeeded to the title in 1721, and a few years afterwards built a hunting and fishing lodge in Croxton Park. He had previously migrated from the family seat of Haddon Hall to Belvoir, which place came into the Manners family by marriage, and, with his famous son the Marquis of Granby, being devoted to sport, he built the lodge as a place of retirement from time to time " in order to escape from the stately splendours of Belvoir." The Duke and his son were devoted to fox-hunting, and about this period the Belvoir hounds, which had previously been kept as buck-hounds, became a fox-hunting pack. It was not until a great many years later, in 1791, that the Belvoir hounds were kennelled at Croxton (when Mr. Perceval took up residence there as acting Master during the minority of the fifth Duke, and the kennels were moved from Witham) ; but their history as fox-hounds is connected with Croxton Park and may be said to date from the building of the third Duke's hunting box.

The turnpike from Melton to Grantham runs round the west and north sides of Croxton Park, after leaving Waltham, past the wood known as Lings Covert, and rises to Croxton Kerrial when it has descended about two hundred feet to a tributary of the river Devon. Near Lings Hill at the north-western corner of the park we look down on Branston, one of the villages on the boundary of the Wednesday country, lying in the Devon Vale. From here the turrets of Belvoir Castle are just visible, while to the right is the gorge through which the Devon passes ; further to the right again is the high country that rolls away towards Grantham. It is a classic landscape, both for its scenery and hunting traditions.

But we must return to the deer park, studded with trees, with its high nine-

barred gates; to the Duke's old hunting box and the lake, which, in Dale's words, " steely grey in the subdued misty light of the November morning, adds a beauty to the landscape." The massed woodlands, the grey stone walls that divide its area into large enclosures, its steep and often rugged contours,

THE DUKE'S HUNTING BOX; CROXTON PARK.

its ancient thorns and forest trees, give to Croxton Park a romantic though somewhat desolate character that makes an impression not easily forgotten. The hunting box is partly in ruins, the columns supporting an ornamental frontage are broken away and covered with ivy. What remains of it has been converted into two cottages for men working on the estate. A large yew tree conceals one end of the building and casts its shade over the small garden adjoining it. Looking down from the hill on which it stands, the

lake can be seen reflecting the branches of the oak trees by the water's edge; their trunks are hollow and contorted with age. Above the trees wild duck and sometimes a flock of geese pass on their way to the more sheltered reservoirs and lakes of Belvoir.

Leaving the park by the gate opposite Bescaby Oaks, the next covert, where the road joins that from Saltby to Croxton Kerrial, is Swallow Hole Spinney, situated in a hollow—its name a variation of the old term " swallow pit."

South of Swallow Hole Spinney, at the four cross-ways, stands Saltby's old grey church. Those who hunted in pre-war days cannot pass it without recalling a figure wearing brown breeches, black coat, jack-boots and topper, mounted on one of his wonderful horses; a figure whose shrewd lean face, lighted by cynical grey eyes, was familiar to all who rode over the Shires, especially to those who rode in the first flight—Parson Seabrooke.

From Saltby, an upland road runs north-east to Wyville, passing over Saltby Heath—now non-existent as a heath, but a table-land of arable fields, where partridges, pheasants and hares abound. The Heath is a district of small fences, but—as is so often the case—a run here will sometimes empty more saddles than many a stiffer country. Herring Gorse, with Lord's Gorse adjoining it, lies a mile east of Saltby. This table-land rises to a height of five hundred feet, and though much of it is cultivated, and all enclosed, the byways have the character of rough moorland tracks, and the presence of fir trees tells of its wilder days. North of the Gorse are the earthworks known as King Lud's entrenchments and ancient tumuli. We are here on the Lincolnshire border, along which runs Sewstern Lane from Three Queens, marking the eastern boundary of the Wednesday country.

On the road from Saltby to Sproxton is an old windmill; its days are over, its sails derelict and motionless. Just before Sproxton is reached, the spacious lines of the countryside are broken by a great rift in the ground, high banks of soil, railway lines and a giant crane. All the work of the last twelve months—the call of iron is irresistible. Everywhere there is ferruginous soil of rich colour. Report says that later on the mineral line will extend to Waltham—that peaceful agricultural centre of the Wolds.

From Sproxton the country rapidly declines for four miles towards the Burton Flats. The river Eye, which has its source near Bescaby Oaks, crosses the road half a mile west of Sproxton Thorns.

This covert lies in true Leicestershire country, though close to the county boundary. The broad fields, divided by fairly stiff fences, stretch away to the Heath on one side and down towards Burton Flats on the other. Foxes seem

FREEBY WOOD.

to have an obstinate habit of running rings round Sproxton Thorns, and making back for the covert some twenty minutes after they have left it. Quite a common sight here is to see a local farmer mounted on a rough horse waiting near the covert after hounds have left, and, his surmises proving correct, galloping across the fields in an endeavour to head off the returning fox. It is a futile proceeding—once the fox has made up his mind to reach the Thorns, he does so, in spite of the rodeo performance of the well-meaning sportsman. But Sproxton Thorns has been the start of many great runs, not the least being that recollected by Dick Christian—a sixteen-mile point to Greetham, where the fox was lost.

The next famous name in this part of Belvoir country is Coston Covert.

At Coston village the Eye has gathered way. It is now a river and runs a foot deep over one of the few remaining fords. Coston Gorse, as it used to be called, is a mile east of the village. It is famous as the start of the Coston run which took place on January 17th, 1863. The fox at first pointed for Garthorpe and Saxby Spinney, but making a right-handed turn, he passed by Brentingby Spinney and crossed the Melton turnpike, as if heading for Melton Spinney. He had been running against the wind, however, and—beginning to tire—turned right-handed again for Waltham, where he was killed in a stack-yard just as he entered the village. The run had lasted fifty minutes at a very fast pace without a check.

This run has been celebrated in an anonymous poem, which—though well known—must be given a place here :

THE COSTON RUN

But little need was there to-day
By Coston Thorns awhile to stay;
For scarce the eastern side we gain,
Scarce tighten girth and bridle-rein,
Ere Cooper's halloo sounds away!
A gallant fox brooks no delay.
Hold hard! a pause—the eager pack,
Their bristles up, no courage lack,
But clear the covert at a bound,
And earnest seek the open ground.
A moment feather here and there,
A moment sniff the tainted air,
Then, dashing to the scent, they show
No common pace they mean to go.
Without a check they hold their own
Along the grass to Garthorpe town,

Then mount the hill, and quietly gain
The spinney crowning Saxby plain.
Away—at undiminished pace,
By Freeby village on they race;
Then seek the heavy fields which lie
Left of the wood of Brentingby,
Where many a rider, stayed perforce,
Was glad to breathe his faltering horse.
For thirty minutes now had stood
The fox before he reached the wood.
Will he its friendly shelter try?
Not he, his motto's do or die.
He leaves it boldly on the right,
And urges on his headlong flight,
Aspires to reach his own abode,
And crosses o'er the Melton road.
For now, on Melton Spinney bent,
He shapes his course with best intent,
Descends the hill which thither leads,
And hastens o'er its molehill meads.
For distant now not many a rood,
That spinney can aloft be view'd.
But, ah! the wind is in his teeth,
A shift he tries to save his breath;
He dare not, cannot, onwards stay,
But tacks and holds another way.
For Waltham makes an effort bold,
And gains the village's stronghold.
A vain attempt to further fly,
Exhausted nature must deny.
A last retreat—last hope of all
He seeks beneath a sheltering stall.
Must the brave beast, his labours o'er,
His blood upon the threshold pour?
He died—as heroes oft have done—
Fresh from the laurels they have won.
For few the foxes who could stay
Before the hounds who ran to-day,
Near fifty minutes, and the pace,
From end to end, almost a race.
Those hounds, who first and foremost shone
Old Rallywood would not disown.
For stoutness well might they aspire
To all the merits of their sire.
To hunt, to race, to hold the lead,
None ere can beat his matchless breed.
For if no fox they hunt—beware!
They love to hunt the timid hare.
Yet only half my story's told,
If I forget the riders bold,
Who, starting from the covert side,
Throughout the chase did foremost ride.

They scarce exceeded half a score,
They might be less, they might be more,
For every one who hunts, we know,
Comes out with the intent to go;
But when the fences bristle thick,
Looks out for squalls, and loves to pick.
The Melton men, ah! where are they,
With Tailby on the grass away?
Not here to criticise the plough,
And struggle through the holding slough;
And so but half a score did see
As good a run as well could be.
No matter then to mention name,
Are they not known enough to fame?
Suffice it—they enjoyed the fun,
Rode straight to hounds and saw the run.
And may they all again essay
To ride as well another day.

East of Coston Covert is Buckminster Park, and then, turning south towards the Eye, passing through Garthorpe, we come to Saxby and the Cottesmore boundary. Beyond the railway is Burbidge's Covert, on the bank of the Eye. The best description of the kind of run which often follows after this covert is drawn is contained in one of the Lays of the Belvoir Hunt by Mr. John Welby, printed in Mr. Dale's history of the Belvoir and introduced with the following comment:

"In order to get a start from 'Burbidge's' you have to get over the river, and many a gallant sportsman has been called back when trying to poach a start at the bridge, and sometimes been left behind, as illustrated by the incident in the following verses by Mr. John Welby:"

A RUN FROM THORPE ARNOLD, 1860

To his friend, Cecil Fane, says my Lord,* "Do you know
That at Burbidge's covert the waters o'erflow?
Come along! we can stand on the top of a ridge,
O'erlooking the covert, and close to a bridge.

'Tis certain the fox will swim over the stream,
And we shall be first is as certain, I deem;
O'er the grass at our ease we can gallop along,
Neither hustled nor prest at the start by a throng."

"Go wherever you like," to him Cecil replies,
"My way with the hounds and no other way lies,
For don't you remember what laughter arose
When I lost a good run the last season at Hose?

* Lord Forester.

By Jove, 'tis a man who his place never yields
To any in crossing the Leicestershire fields,
But hates in the ploughs of Belvoir to dodge.
'Tis the Earl.† 'Tis the owner of Egerton Lodge.

By Stapleford Spinneys we hurry along,
The pace is so good the hounds hardly give tongue;
For Ranksboro' covert our fox seems inclined,
But changes his purpose and turns down the wind.

Over fences and fields pretty quickly we strode,
Till we crossed, near Leesthorpe, the Melton high-road,
And passing by Barton and Dalby, we gain
The covert of Gartree before checking rein.

For years in my court I a race have been running
'Gainst all sorts of artifice, dodging and cunning;
In the chase I have made up my mind to go straight
Not to skirt, or to crane, or to ride to a gate.

The left is my way here, and yours is the right,
Remember my warning—I pity your plight;
When you see me afar in the very first flight,
Then you will be left, my Lord, I shall be right."

Good luck to a covert that finds us such game,
Four foxes afoot are the least I can name;
Two scarlets are seen on the opposite hill,
Regarding the start with forebodings of ill.

Says Cecil, "I see that some party has taken
The place with my Lord I have wisely forsaken;
Do look at the couple, pray who can it be
Who follows a leader instead of being free?"

Oh, where in the thickening fog can we find
The two gallant sportsmen we left far behind?
Do they patiently sit on the top of the ridge,
Expecting the fox will return by the bridge?

Cries Cecil enveloped in glory and mud,
"This lesson will do my Lord Forester good;
For years we have had an encounter of wits—
Our score is cleared off, for to-day we are quits."

† Earl of Wilton.

CHAPTER II

WEDNESDAY COUNTRY (*continued*)

"To those who rode through the whole run I can swear
The Duke and his huntsman were certainly there.
I can tell you, my lad, too, that I did not lag;
I got to the end, but I finished my nag."

JOHN WELBY.

THE road from Melton to Scalford runs half a mile west of the railway, which follows the course of the Scalford Brook until it branches to the left through Scalford Station. Clawson tunnel, north of the station, is on the present boundary of the Wednesday country, now that it includes Clawson Thorns.

Once clear of the confines of Melton, the road gradually ascends to Scalford Hall, overlooking the railway and Scalford Brook on the right, with Melton Spinney clearly seen on the opposite slope of the valley. The full extent of the spinney is now visible, climbing to the field-track running along the top of the ridge. Close to the Scalford road, on the left, is Scalford Ashes. The covert is situated in the angle formed by the road branching off to Holwell and the Framland Lane which joins it. Half a mile north-west is the famous covert, Old Hills. The country here is an undulating upland extending to the Nottingham turnpike and the Quorn boundary. The grassland is broken by some large fields of plough, and beyond Old Hills is the mineral railway running through Holwell beside the brook that flows into Quorn country past Welby Osiers. The fences in this district are rough and unkempt, with numerous gaps, most of them stiffly railed. When a fox takes a line from Melton Spinney to Holwell Mouth, or across the Nottingham road into Quorn country, there is plenty of jumping for those who like timber, and some big thorn fences in the vicinity of the high-road. Horses are pretty well pumped out after a fast burst over Quorn territory ending in a return to Melton Spinney, and on such occasions a check on the Scalford road in the neighbourhood of the Ashes or Scalford Hall is always welcome. There is a small farm by the roadside where hounds checked after a particularly brisk gallop last season, but this respite,

with steaming horses pulled up in the rick-yard, was of short duration, and hounds were soon on the line again and down the valley.

Scalford Hall lies left of the road a mile before the village is reached, when, after crossing the railway, the pleasant old houses of Scalford come into view. A meet in Scalford, with hounds assembled in a paddock by the side of the village street, and scarlet coats contrasting with the dull red of the weathered garden walls and houses, is one of the most picturesque in Belvoir country. The village is a straggling one, and the Hunt threads its winding and intricate streets, thronged with onlookers, before turning to the right on to the field road to Melton Spinney. North of the village is Scalford Bog, where one of the great Belvoir runs had its commencement.

The run, one of two that made January 1862 famous in the annals of the Hunt, took place on the 4th of the month, and is thus described by one who was present, the writer of the account being Mr. Frederick Sloane Stanley :

" The first of these (two runs) was from Scalford Bog on January 4th. On the morning of that day we had a fair hunting run from Melton Spinney, crossing the brook twice, eventually losing our fox near that covert. Mr. Bower Talbot, the son of the veterinary surgeon of that name, had a fall at the Melton Brook the second time of crossing, and his horse remained for some time in the brook before he could be got out, but he was none the worse and he rode him again in the second run. We drew Scalford Bog about three o'clock on that afternoon. A fine fox went away towards Goadby Gorse, but leaving that covert one field to his left, made as if for Waltham, but bearing to the left again, he passed over Mr. Rippin's large grass fields, which were strongly fenced with ox-rails. The huntsman's horse, after clearing the fence, lit with his hind legs on an oxer, smashing it to pieces and making it an easier place for the rest of the field who followed him. Those who were well to the front at this time were Mr. Bruxner, Mr. Henry Partridge, myself and my brother, Mr. Francis Sloane Stanley, Captain Owen Williams, Mr. John Welby, Mr. Bower Talbot and one or two farmers. Shortly afterwards we crossed the Melton and Grantham turnpike road at the little dip in the road to the north of the site of the old toll-bar. The pace was a regular cracker as we passed Stonesby Gorse, leaving the covert on our right until we got to Garthorpe Moor. Over the plough they went at a steadier pace, which enabled the Duke of Rutland and others to catch us up near Coston. The huntsman, the whipper-in and I all fell together at a very blind ditch on the taking-off side of a fence out of a deep ploughed field, and the three horses got away and mine followed

NEAR SCALFORD

on with the hunt for half a mile or more, and I saw him jumping the fences until he was out of sight, and I had to follow on the line on foot until I found my horse which had been caught and kindly tied up to a gate-post by Mr. John Welby. The huntsman's horse did not go very far and was soon caught and remounted by him. They ran past Coston and made as if for Woodwell Head, but did not go into the covert, and there was no check until they ran into a small plantation not far from Barrow Gorse. Unfortunately a fresh fox jumped up here; the hounds divided, and some time was lost in getting them

MEET OF THE BELVOIR AT HOLWELL.

together again. They then ran through Barrow Gorse, and as it was becoming very dark and all the horses were beat, the huntsman was obliged to whip off, so this good fox saved his life. Very few got to the end of this grand run, the distance of which from point to point must have been at least fourteen or fifteen miles. The run was too much for Mr. Bower Talbot's fine hunter, and he died in some farm buildings near the spot where the hounds were stopped, and though the horse which Mr. Francis Sloane Stanley rode got to the end of the run, it never came out again that season. Two or three of the hunt servants' horses were also done up for the season. Among the few who got to the end of this famous run were the Duke of Rutland, Mr. John Welby, Mr. Partridge, Mr. Bruxner, Mr. Owen Williams, Mr. Francis Sloane Stanley, Mr. Gordon,

Mr. Bower Talbot, and the huntsman and first whip, and perhaps one or two more."

Two miles north-east of Scalford is Goadby Gorse, after which the road turns left through the village of Goadby Marwood. North of the village there is no important covert before the Wednesday boundary is reached at Eastwell and Eaton; south of it, following the road through Wycomb, we re-enter Scalford, cross the railway, and a mile further on strike Landyke Lane. This broad grass track leads from Scalford Ashes to Long Clawson and Hose Station in the Saturday country, the major part of it now being included in the Wednesday country. Half a mile north of the Ashes, a road branches off to Holwell, leading through fields and gates over deserted uplands, and dropping steeply to the little village. Holwell lies in a fold of the high ground; west of the village are the ironstone quarries, and the mineral railway bearing its loaded trucks to Holwell iron-works, south of Welby in Quorn country. The curious appearance of the little church attracts attention, and forms a quaint background to a meet of the hounds on the steep grass slope beneath it. Ironstone is everywhere insistent, giving a rugged appearance to the village, and the church recalls some of the granite chapels in Cornwall. The suggestion of the West Country ceases, however, with the rich ferruginous colour of the soil. The few fields of plough round Holwell proclaim the presence of iron.

Leaving the village by a steep ascent, and passing through many gates that bar the road, the covert known as Holwell Mouth is reached, just beyond the quarry. Here the road joins the Old Salt Way—or what was once its course—and the steep declivity of Holwell Mouth faces the spot where the road forks; the Salt Way leading past Broughton Hill, and a lower road, after ascending a steep pitch, joining the turnpike at Abb-Kettleby. The covert is sometimes called "Horrible Mouth." It is a difficult place from which to get a good start if a fox goes away on the far side from where the field are collected. The ride runs round the edge of a small crater, to descend which is impossible; and galloping round it as one of a crowd is something of a trial to an impatient rider, with the hounds well away for Saxelby or sinking the hill into the Vale.

The second of the two coverts that originally belonged to the Saturday country is the famous Clawson Thorns. A few tall trees rise from a sea of thorns on the western slope of a hill overloooking the village of Long Clawson in the Vale. Further down the hill, on its northern slope and lying remote from the road, is Newcome's Planting, making a third covert—an adjunct to the Thorns—now included as a Wednesday draw. This was once cut down, but has now grown up as a tangled jungle of undergrowth. At the foot of the

hill runs a stream, one of the minor tributaries of the Smite. Clawson Thorns is admirably situated for a gallop over the Vale, beyond the boundary of the Wednesday country as at present confined.

From the surrounding country the view is extensive, and there is a story of an old sportsman—a Mr. Cook, well known in Long Clawson, who died a few years ago—who was such an enthusiast that he would stand for hours on Slyborough Hill watching with field-glasses the progress of the hunt. Although over eighty years of age he would follow hounds on foot, neither snow nor pelting rain could deter him. He was an owner of threshing tackle and of seed-drills on their first appearance in the early days, but a passion for the chase absorbed him. On one occasion he actually stopped threshing a neighbour's harvest—to his very natural annoyance—while he followed the hunt, vanishing at the sound of the horn.

Such a man is typical of the sporting farmers of the Shires—and the Belvoir country has bred many of them : men like Mr. Wing, of whom Dick Christian remarked to The Druid, " John Wing, of Sedgebrook, was one of the best riders across the Vale as a farmer in those days tremendious," or Mr. Burbidge of Thorpe Arnold, after whom Lord Forester named the covert by the Eye. Each generation adds new names to the list of farmer-sportsmen, and many of the older names are as well known to-day as they were nearly a century ago.

CHAPTER III

A SUMMARY OF BELVOIR HISTORY

"What a lot of them there were at Belvoir fifty years ago; such riders!—Lord Forester, Lord Jersey, Lord Delamere (Mr. Cholmondeley that was then), Lord Robert and Lord Charles Manners (them were the Duke's brothers), Colonel Mellish, and Mr. Assheton Smith—all riding like devils against each other across the Vale."—DICK CHRISTIAN.

DURING the years immediately following the death of the second Duke of Rutland in 1721, when the third Duke built the hunting box in Croxton Park, it is definitely known that the Belvoir hounds began hunting the fox. But at that time and until 1732 the hounds were controlled by the association, including the third Duke and Lord Gainsborough, already referred to. In the following paragraph Mr. Dale gives the position of affairs after Lord Gainsborough had retired from the "joint-stock company":

"In 1732, by which time the very moderate expenditure mentioned above * had greatly increased, Lord Gainsborough separated from the association and took as his share of the hounds twenty-five couples, with which he began to hunt the country now known as the Cottesmore. There is still at Belvoir a somewhat voluminous correspondence which passed between the Duke and Lord Gainsborough as to the possession of a certain large caldron, used for cooking the hounds' food, to which both noble masters laid claim. The smallness of the sum assigned for the large staff of hunt-servants, including two cooks, during the time of the joint ownership of the hounds, was not intended probably to cover more than the common expenditure, and each of the partners must have supplemented it considerably. The date of 1732, if it does not mark the beginning of the Belvoir pack, doubtless does give us the origin of the country and of the better preservation of foxes, for 'Old Noel,' as Colonel Cooke calls Lord Gainsborough, hunted an immense territory, including the whole or parts of Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Rutlandshire and Notting-

* Each member of the company contributed £150 annually towards the maintenance of the Hunt.

hamshire. The Belvoir pack would seem, therefore, before this date, to have had the estates of the Duke of Rutland and the Lincolnshire side of their present territory as their peculiar field. It was not till some years later that the limits of the Quorn (Mr. Meynell's) Hunt and the Belvoir were definitely agreed upon. . . ."

The third Duke was the first Master of the Belvoir Hunt as it is known to-day. He held the position nominally until the end of his life, though his famous son, the Marquis of Granby, may have been Master in the field about 1750, and probably was so from about 1766 until his death in 1770—the Duke outlived him by nine years. In 1758 Lord Granby left England and fought at the battle of Minden as Colonel of the Blues, two years later leading the charge at Warburg, when the British cavalry inflicted a crushing defeat on the Austrians, capturing 1500 men and ten pieces of artillery. As Commander of the British forces at Warburg, and later in the stubborn battle on the heights of Vellinghausen, and through the heavy fighting of the last campaign, Granby returned the popular hero of the war in 1763. During the few years that remained to him, he may have found some relaxation from his duties as Commander-in-Chief as Master of Hounds in the Belvoir woodlands.

The old Duke did not take an active part in hunting after his son's death, and his grandson, the fourth Duke, was indifferent to it. At this time the hounds were apparently under the management of Mr. Thomas Thoroton, of Scrieveton; and Shaw, who hunted Mr. Musters' hounds after they were sold to Sir Harry Harpur, took the hounds for a season or two before he became huntsman to the Belvoir later on. The fourth Duke went to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant in 1784, and it is said that for a few seasons Lord George Cavendish and Sir Carnaby Haggerston were Masters until four years after the Duke's death in 1787. But Mr. Perceval took over the hounds in 1791, and continued in control during the long minority of the fifth Duke, who was nine years old at the time of his father's death.

Newman was huntsman to Mr. Perceval, and is the first Belvoir huntsman who ranks with such names as Jack Raven, Dick Knight and others of the period, with the exception of Shaw, who had the hounds for a brief space, as stated, before he succeeded Newman.

In 1799 the fifth Duke came of age, and took over the Mastership of the hounds about 1804, with Shaw as his huntsman. The latter introduced the more decisive style of hunting which had already become famous with the Quorn. During Shaw's first season a great run took place from Jericho Covert (referred to in the next chapter), which delighted the hard-riding Meltonians

who were present and much increased his reputation. The young Duke was a keen sportsman and at this time the Belvoir came very much to the fore as a fashionable Hunt. The hounds were noted for their quickness in getting away on a scent, a quality which they have ever afterwards retained.

Thomas Goosey became huntsman on Shaw's retirement in 1816, and in this year occurred the disastrous fire at Belvoir Castle, as the result of which a great part of the building, which had been gradually added to since 1801, was destroyed.

The famous Barrowby run—from Ropsley Rise to Barrowby Thorns and Allington—took place the next season and further increased the popularity of the Belvoir pack. It had now become the regular custom in Melton to hunt with the Belvoir two days a week, when the Quorn were on the Charnwood side of their country. Every year now saw an improvement in the hounds. The Cottesmore, of which George Slack was huntsman, still continued the older and slower style of hunting—the newer method being adopted some years later when Colonel Lowther became Master—and for the time being the Belvoir and Quorn shared the honours with the hard-riding contingent. The season 1824—25, however, was remarkable for the badness of the foxes, and for a short period sport with the Belvoir declined.

In 1825 the Belvoir hounds were first crossed with the Brocklesby, the result proving very successful. A few years later, the Duke of Rutland was unable to take the same personal interest in the hounds owing to the many duties which filled his time, and in 1830 he handed over the Mastership to Lord Forester.

The new Master—young, handsome, a fine rider and great sportsman—carried the horn until 1858, when he resigned in favour of the sixth Duke. The period of his Mastership is one of the most brilliant in the annals of the Hunt. Goosey remained as huntsman until 1835, when Lord Forester appointed William Goodall.

Nimrod describes the Belvoir hounds at this time, writing in the *Sporting Review* in May 1839 :

" Of the Belvoir hounds, my opinion is expressed in a few words. Under every advantage of upwards of thirty years' establishment under the eyes of clever men, and with those means in particular so necessary to the end which large possessions by the owners of them can hardly fail to afford, they are allowed to have arrived at perfection in form and likewise in their work. The style of hound is also described in a few words. Like the thorough-bred horse, he exhibits a frame peculiarly fitted for the work he has to perform, combining immense powers, for his size, *disguised*, if I may be allowed the expression, by

THE FOX RETURNS TO SPROXTON THORNS

the elegance of his form. But, to speak more soberly, in looking over the pack that was this day out, the eye was attracted to the following distinguishing features. First, their extremely placid demeanour while waiting for the time of throwing off. It resembled that of what is termed the sluggish thoroughbred horse previously to his being roused into action. Secondly, the sort of family likeness which reigned throughout the pack. Thirdly, the generally perfect and exact symmetry of their form; and, lastly, the form itself. It has the length necessary to speed and essential to the *stride* which a roomy, and, in parts, highly ridged country requires, with a display of power in certain portions of the frame, as well as in the acting parts, which cannot be too much admired. For example: the combination of strength with depth of *rib* is remarkable in these hounds, so distinguished for their blood-like appearance, and this combination is again strengthened by their powerful loins and muscular hind legs. The head of the Belvoir fox-hound has long been remarkable for somewhat of a peculiar construction and for being short. This peculiarity, however, did not strike me so forcibly as when I last saw the pack. Their legs and feet appeared straight and good, as a matter of course, where such choice of entry is at command and their bone quite equal to their frame.

"In their work the Belvoir hounds are allowed to be eminent for the manner in which they drive a scent when it is ahead, and for the quick and decisive manner in which they turn with it when it is no longer ahead. This excellence is essential to killing *a stout fox which runs short*, and the absence of it accounts for the frequent loss of such foxes. The general speed of hounds, indeed, in runs of a certain description, entirely depends on the extent to which they possess this quality. Without it, I should say the chances are three to one in favour of the fox on a good scenting day. I wish to observe that the foregoing remarks are the result entirely of my own observation, not having had conversation with any individual on the subject.

"The general speed of the Belvoir hounds has long been proverbial."

Further on in the same article, Nimrod recounts an incident of the run with the Belvoir in which he took part:

"There were, likewise, two conspicuous characters this day in the field, appertaining to the softer sex, namely Miss Manners of Goadby Hall and Miss Charlesworth. Of the latter I saw nothing in the burst, as she did not go on my line; but I heard an anecdote of her that should not go unrecorded, as it shows she 'comes of a good sort,' as Dick Christian says of a horse, and that she herself is not likely to introduce a bad cross. Getting a very bad fall some time back, and being rather seriously damaged, she was strongly advised to

return home. 'Oh, no,' she replied, 'I must not do that; papa would be *very angry* if I came home before the run was over.'"

Among others who were out the same day were two German Princes and a German Count—an author of books on horses—who had hunted in Leicestershire for two seasons. Nimrod had himself come over from his retirement at Calais for a brief return to the Shires.

CROXTON PARK.

Lord Forester and Will Goodall steadily improved the pack in the years that followed; they hunted five days a week and good runs were innumerable. A difficulty, however, arose with regard to expenses, and there was a possibility of Lord Forester's resignation in 1842. Eventually a settlement was arrived at, and among other curtailments, the number of days' hunting was reduced to four. The shadow cast over agriculture by the threatened repeal of the Corn Laws had its effect on landowners in the district who were subscribers to the Hunt. In spite, however, of this menace to their prosperity and the unsettled

state of the country, the sport recorded during the next few years was in no way inferior to that of the preceding seasons.

Lord Forester resigned after the death of the Duke of Rutland, and the sixth Duke became Master in 1858. James Cooper, who had acted as whipper-in to Goodall, was appointed huntsman soon afterwards.

Mr. Frederick Sloane Stanley mentions a curious and unpleasant incident which occurred in 1863 :

" After meeting at Croxton Park on a fine hunting morning, the Duke of Rutland gave the order to the huntsman to draw Coston covert, at which covert we shortly found a fine fox, which went away in the direction of Buckminster, closely pursued by hounds. The pack got away with a good start from the covert, but when they had gone about two fields, they suddenly ceased to give tongue, and threw up their heads, and began casting about. A labourer then informed the huntsman that he had seen a tall man, who was standing about with a gun close by, shoot the fox just in front of the pack, and that he had concealed the carcass in a hovel hard by. The Duke, who was close up at the time, was informed of this, and immediately rode up to the man with the gun, and accused him of having shot his fox, and demanded that the dead animal should be given up to him at once. On the man's declining to do so, and at the same time placing his back against the door of the hovel, the Duke signalled to his second-horseman to come and hold his horse, and got off him and went up to the offender, and again asked him to give up his fox. On his again declining to do so, he seized him round the waist, and tried to remove him from the door of the hovel, and a short struggle took place between the two, which ended in both rolling over, with the Duke on the top. In the meantime, a Spanish Count, who was a spectator of the struggle, seeing that the farmer still retained his gun, jumped off his horse and snatched the gun away from him, for which he got some kudos, as the gun might have gone off and caused an accident. The Duke, having got the better of the tussle, jumped up quickly and opened the door of the building, and took out the dead body of the fox, which he handed over at once to the huntsman, and told him to give it to the hounds, which was done immediately, nearly the whole field being present at the time. The Count then came up to his Grace with the gun, and said to him, ' What shall I do with the gun, my Lord ? Shall we shoot him ? ' (meaning the offender). This, of course, caused much amusement, and shouts of ' No ! no ! put the gun into a wet ditch.' The Count seemed much disappointed at this and remarked, ' We should have made away with him in my country.' "

The incident caused great indignation against the offender among the

farmers of the Belvoir Hunt, and it was discovered that the man was not the tenant of the field where he shot the fox.

There was a good hunt from Piper Hole in 1866, when T.R.H. the Prince and Princess of Wales paid a visit to Belvoir. The Prince was presented with the brush not far from Clawson Thorns. This run was followed by another over a stiff line in the direction of Plungar, the Prince of Wales being well up in both.

Frank Gillard became huntsman in 1870, and hunted the hounds alone for several seasons, when, towards the end of his life, the Duke, though still Master, was unable to be present in the field. The Duke had been a very hard rider and had taken a great many falls; the results of these, and the gout, eventually forcing him to give up hunting. He came out from time to time, as keen as ever, but during his long absences, sometimes abroad, Gillard was entirely responsible, and was expected to send him regularly an account of each day's sport. Gillard was very successful as a hound-breeder. He knew exactly where to get a new strain to give any particular quality required in his hounds, and thoroughly understood the science. The Duke himself gave the matter of hound-breeding a great deal of attention, even after he ceased to hunt, and it is said that when crippled with gout he would come to the kennels, where he had a special room with a rail to protect him when he was inspecting the hounds. In spite of the responsibilities which his position entailed, Gillard continued to show excellent sport until the end, but changes were in the air.

The sixth Duke of Rutland died in 1888, and the Mastership was taken by the seventh Duke until 1896, when he decided to give up the sole responsibility of his hounds, appointing Sir Gilbert Greenall as Master, Ben Capell being huntsman. Sir Gilbert Greenall retired in 1912, Lord Robert Manners and Major T. Bouch were joint Masters until 1914, and Major Bouch continued as Master until 1924, when he was succeeded by Captain Marshall Roberts.

Major Bouch hunted the hounds during his Mastership, but Nimrod Capell was appointed huntsman in 1924.

The present kennels at Belvoir were built in 1809, and the hounds were then moved from Croxton Park, where they had been kennelled since the death of the fourth Duke. There have also been additional kennels at Wilsford, midway between Sleaford and Grantham, convenient for coverts on the eastern side of the Belvoir country; and at Ropsley, four miles east of Grantham, used on occasions when Lord Forester was Master, but given up soon after Gillard became huntsman. At that time hounds were taken to distant fixtures in a van, and there was no longer any need for outlying kennels.

CHAPTER IV

THE VALE OF BELVOIR

"Ye sportsmen, attend to my song,
Which to please you I hope will not fail:
It's a fox-chase full three hours long,
And was run over Belvoir's sweet Vale."

CECIL FORESTER.

AFTER the austere and somewhat melancholy aspect of Croxton Park, where the stone-walled uplands of the North seem to have invaded the Midlands, the summit of Lings Hill affords a pleasant surprise: Branston lies at its foot, with the woods of Stathern, Plungar and Barkestone rising above the tawny gold of the nearer fields. Branston itself, though separated from the flat country beyond by the Belvoir heights, has the peaceful aspect of a village in the Vale. On the right the woods round Knipton rise in a dark mass to the confines of Belvoir, with the river Devon flowing through its gorges to the Belvoir lakes, on its way to Newark, where it joins the Trent.

Branston is on the southern boundary of what is known as the Melton Saturday country. The boundary runs east to Three Queens, then north between Belvoir and Woolsthorpe to Muston, where it turns west through Bottesford and Elton to Whatton. From Whatton it runs south-west to Colston Basset, and then follows the course of the Smite to the present Wednesday boundary just north of Holwell Mouth. The far Saturday country contains only a small angle of Leicestershire, south of Three Shires Bush, two and a half miles from Bottesford, and is therefore outside the scope of this book. That part of the Vale included in the Melton Saturday country which lies north-west of the Grantham Canal is in South Notts; otherwise the Melton Saturday country is entirely in Leicestershire, its eastern boundary following that of the county.

The tour of this country described in the following pages was made in October, when Jericho had already heard the sound of the horn, and many early mornings had seen hounds in the Vale.

If Croxton Park is sombre, even in autumn—the oaks of Bescaby still dark

and rather monotonous in hue, and the ancient thorns in the park itself gnarled and grey as they look at all seasons—the Belvoir woods display the glowing colours of an old tapestry, the chestnuts especially have a deep brilliance in their gold.

The village of Knipton, on the banks of the Devon, looks across the river at

A GLIMPSE OF BELVOIR CASTLE.

Granby Wood. The road from Branston passes the reservoir, and enters Knipton, after which it turns sharp to the right by the gates of the park. The private road to Belvoir is now closed, and the way round leads by Harston. The Castle comes into view, seen above the woods through the branches of great chestnut trees that border the Harston road. With the low autumn sun shining upon its walls, giving them a pale luminous character contrasting with the soft blues and greys, tinged with warmer tones, of the distant woods; and the

seamed trunks of the chestnut trees like pillars on either side of the receding vista of the park, the broad fans of their leaves festooned above it, Belvoir is as great a contrast to Croxton as can well be imagined. From this point of view the Castle stands clear above the woods, its many towers and turrets delicately outlined against the pale tone of the sky. The crest of the woods swells past it in long sweeping curves, rising on the left to overshadow Knipton village. Bearing upon its surface heavy showers of fallen leaves, the Devon flows from the reservoir, past the old red houses of the village, into Belvoir lake.

One mile south of the road is the covert, Croxton Banks, on the north slope of the hill, up the other side of which climbs the village of Croxton Kerrial. Further east are the woods round Blackwell Lodge. Turning to the left at Harston, the next village is Woolsthorpe. The Belvoir kennels are half a mile to the left of the road before Woolsthorpe is reached, on the far bank of the Devon, and just within the Leicestershire boundary. They are situated in the confines of Belvoir, close to Briery Wood, below Jackberry Hill.

The long and straggling village of Woolsthorpe in Lincolnshire follows the course of the river, and at the four cross-roads beyond its northern end there is a bridge over the Devon. A private road leads back into Leicestershire, and to Belvoir Castle, crossing the park and affording a clear view of the Vale. The Belvoir heights now lie to the south and west. As the road curves round towards the Castle, the church spire of Redmile, on the banks of the canal, can be plainly seen; and away to the north, the spire of Muston, marking the boundary of the Melton Saturday country. The Castle rises sharply above the trees, silhouetted against the sun, and appearing quite close. The road passes immediately below it, and then turns to the left, straight across the Vale to Redmile. Before the road turns, the wood of Calcroft Close can be seen a few fields away, and Muston Gorse further north. The view is then hidden for a quarter of a mile by Saltbeck Wood, after which the flat country spreads out on either hand.

Redmile and the canal are soon reached. The very fine old church is passed and the canal bridge crossed. Less than two miles away is Jericho Covert, or Jericho Wood as it is now called. It has also been called Jericho Thorns, but is perhaps best known to fame as simply Jericho.

A grass track to Jericho Lodge is reached from Barkestone, and the canal is recrossed between this village and Redmile by a narrow stone bridge. The old windmill just beyond the bridge suggests pictures by Maris or Anton Mauve, the slats of the sails pencilled against the clear sky. For more than a hundred years it has stood there, a landmark to sportsmen of the eighteenth century as

it is to those of to-day. The great three hours' run of 1805 had its first check in a field close to this mill. Turning to the right by Barkestone Church, again crossing the canal—and this time the railway as well—a remote part of the Vale is reached. This area is a square formed by the roads running through Granby and Sutton, Plungar and Redmile, and the railway. Each side of the square is nearly two miles in length; within it there are no roads, only rough grass-grown tracks. Almost in its centre is Jericho Covert.

The low farm buildings of Jericho Lodge have not even a track approaching them, merely the ruts worn by carts crossing the fields, which indicate direction.

JERICHO COVERT.

These alone show the way, whether the farm is approached from Barkestone or from Granby, until its low roofs are in sight. The thorns of Jericho can be seen north of the farm, a rectangular patch of low growth set among tawny grass fields and acres of plough, with a few oak trees standing in a wilderness of dry hemlock stems and brambles at its southern end.

Looking north-west over the Vale, field after field recedes across the flat country, divided by a regular succession of thorn fences, towards Granby and Sutton.

On two sides of the covert the ploughed earth runs up to its boundary, but north and west of it the near fields are grass. It is mainly composed of blackthorn, choked round its edges with seeding grasses and the tall stems of the

hemlocks. The Nottingham boundary runs along its north-western side, but the covert is in Leicestershire.

From Jericho, on December 10th, 1805, there started one of the longest runs in the history of hunting.

The ground was covered with snow and it was bitterly cold, when the fifth Duke of Rutland, with Shaw as his huntsman, took the hounds from the neighbourhood of Waltham, where there seemed little chance of hunting on the high ground, to Jericho in the Vale. The snow-storm of the early morning had whitened the hills but left the low country comparatively free. On arrival at the covert, the Hunt was informed that a fox had been seen to enter it, disturbed in a stubble field, and soon after hounds were thrown in, two foxes broke away. Hounds were holloaed on to the line of a fox that ran along the hedgerow at the north-east corner of the covert, pressing him very hard across the Whatton road. The fox turned to the right, however, and had nearly reached the canal, when hounds were over-ridden and checked. Hounds hunted forward and crossed the canal, and the fox got up from some rough, sedgy ground in a field opposite the Redmile windmill.

Then it was that the real run started, the fox making at a great pace for Bottesford, swinging to the left nearly to Elton, and then crossing the Nottingham road at the toll-bar, going on across the Devon, and between the villages of Normanton and Kilvington in a direct line for Staunton.

Many of the field were thrown out at the canal bridge and did not see the hounds again until the fox turned back from Cotham, having passed Staunton and here reached the northern limit of his run. Riding at a great pace with snow lying in patches under a heavy sky, and horses already showing signs of distress, it is not surprising that only two of the field faced the risk of a ducking in the chill waters of the Devon Brook. Mr. Forester cleared it and rode on; John Wing (the sporting farmer of " those days tremendious ") went at it and fell. The rest crossed it as best they could at a watering-place for cattle. Before he reached Cotham the fox was viewed, and having run ten miles up wind, he changed his course near the village. His rapid turn threw hounds off for a few moments. The fox was seen by Mr. Cholmondeley, one of those who came up after losing hounds at the canal (or in his own case after a fall), with the result that he was headed, and lost some of the advantage gained; but he veered east, and then south to Long Bennington, Foston and Allington. Continuing south, he was again headed by the canal near Sedgebrook, after having been viewed by the whole field leaving Sir John Thorold's plantation. Here he was nearly accounted for by two couples of hounds who were close to his brush,

but having eluded them, he ran on faster than ever by Sedgebrook for Barrowby Thorns.

At this period of the run the field thinned out rapidly, many of the horses being in great distress, and the fox, disdaining to enter Barrowby Thorns, gave them no respite. Instead, he made for Gunnerby, and then for the canal close to the wharf at Grantham. The animal seems to have had a surprising knowledge of the country, for he crossed all water by bridges wherever available, and in this case, immediately on reaching the canal, made for the swing bridge at the toll-bar, which he crossed under the eyes of a man who was standing there. He had now gained ten minutes on the hounds.

The fox was decidedly " one up " in the later stages of this Homeric run, but the pace of the hounds had never slackened since leaving Grantham, and a field reduced to ten at most followed them over the Melton road, by Harlaxton Wood, to Stroxton. By the time the North Road was crossed, and the fox, after skirting Great Boothby Wood, swung round and recrossed the North Road, making for Stoke Park, five or six riders only were on terms with the hounds. The fox doubled back on his tracks, again crossed the North Road, and, apparently full of running, made for Burton Slade Wood. Here Cecil Forester and one or two others decided to whip off the hounds. The run had lasted three hours, the furthest point reached being eighteen miles, the finish fourteen miles from Jericho.

Cecil Forester wrote a poem in commemoration of the run, entitled " A Hunting Song," which is printed in full in Dale's " History of the Belvoir," but being very long, only the verses describing the actual run can be quoted here. " Jericho Thorn " is reached at the end of the second verse, the run commencing in verse three :

" The hounds had not been there a minute
  When the Duke cried, ' Hark, holloa, away ! '
Not a hound was then left behind in it,
  You'd swear they would show him some play.
The hard riders jumped off in a crack,
  Not one of them minding their neck,
And for Belvoir were running him back
  When *Tom Smith* * rode the hounds to a check.

The huntsman came on his grey,
  And rolled his eye round like a hawk;
Not a second in that place would he stay,
  As your sport he never will baulk.

* T. Assheton Smith.

He then made a cast with his hounds,
When the fox jumped quickly in view,
And like pigeons they skirted the grounds,
And left Craven, Vanneck and a few.

Away to the posts and the rails
And enclosures that fence Bottesford town;
Distress was soon marked in their tails,
E'en some of no common renown.
Sir Cecil * made at such a brook,
On Bernado, who ne'er baulked a place;
Little Wing, who scorns ever to look,
Followed after and fell on his face.

For Normanton covert he went,
Where he left many Taylors behind;
Fine land and a rare burning scent
Were the cause of his changing his mind.
They skirted Long Bennington town,
And by the North Road up to Cotham,
When Cholmondeley's † nag laid himself down,
Having tried, proved, and found out his bottom.

Old Reynard now turned short about,
For his country he wished to regain;
A rare lift for many, no doubt,
Since Craven came in here again.
Up-wind,‡ sir, he now steered apace,
Not hearing a hound in the nation;
The best horses could scarce keep their place
Till he got into Thorold's plantation.

Tom Thoroton, well known in the Vale,
Who at Flintham takes up his abode,
Of potterers now led a rare tail,
Who with him ne'er quitted the road.
But the hounds ran away from them fairly,
And mounted high Barrowby Hill;
Smith's grey, who had carried him rarely,
Declined, and was forced to stand still.

They fled, like the birds of the air,
From thence into Grantham's town end,
Where Wing stopped his little game mare,
And Lindo § could scarcely descend.
In the former hard part of this run
His riding was thought quite divine,
But alas! poor Fortunio's done,
And the contest obliged to resign.

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* First Lord Forester. † Lord Delamere. ‡ After he was headed.
§ Lindow; owner of the celebrated Leicestershire hunter, "The Clipper."

Some folks think it odd now, I take it,
  There's a horse that I never did name;
A secret no longer I'll make it—
  'Tis Smuggler, that horse of great fame.
But smuggled goods, unfairly made,
  Are always disposed of at night;
Cornewall's * nag, being one of that trade,
  Chose never to come into sight.

Lord Charles sat erect upon Drone,
  With a face that is void of a smile,
But he's blood to the very backbone,
  Though his horse could not go the last mile.
At Strawston † the Duke lost a shoe—
  'Pray a hunter to follow my pack';
'They are watered and won't do for you,
  But I'll lend you my little grey hack.'

Old Reynard we stoutly pursued
  To the back of, I think, Paunton town,
When a footman, who had him just viewed,
  Said, 'He's tired and nearly run down.'
Vansittart here hit a rail with his knee
  So hard that he made it to shiver,
Which when Peter Burrell did see
  He took fright and turned into the river.

Thus Yarboro, Douglas, Tomkino,
  Three sportsmen of very great merit,
But for riding they're always in rear O,
  Tho' nobody can doubt their spirit.
Surely they had much better to settle
  One rider to send out each day,
And to him if they'll lend all their mettle,
  He'd certainly then show the way.

Full gallop thro' Goadby there came
  A redcoat upon a grey mare,
So eager that both blind and lame
  Ran out for to see who was there.
"Have you seen the hounds here?" he cried,
  And spurring, flanked on his old nag;
It is Squire Norman,‡ quite wild
  And fairly worn to a rag.

In three miles this noble chase ended,
  We whipped off at Barton Slade Wood;
To the Castle we then our pace mended,
  And trotted as fast as we could.

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* Sir George Cornewall, a visitor at Belvoir.
† The residence of Mr. Perceval, the late Master.
‡ Of Goadby Hall.

The ladies (God bless their sweet faces!)
With smiles came to welcome us home;
Their looks were like those of the Graces
And old Belvoir Olympus's Dome.

The poem has six more verses, but they do not directly concern the hunt.

While standing by Jericho's tangled blackthorns, with not a soul in sight

THE FIELD WAY TO GRANBY.

and nothing moving but the plover circling down to alight on the ploughed earth, one cannot help marvelling at the silence and solitude of this part of the Vale. Bottesford is less than three miles away, and there are six smaller villages within two miles of the covert, yet there are few places which have the appearance of being more out of the world. Two trackless fields—even the cart-ruts are overgrown and at times lost—lead to a grass way to Granby. Under a hedge the blue smoke of a gipsies' fire blows up through coarse grass and a forest of thistles which almost hides the squatting figures. The wheels of carts and horses' feet have here worn three deep grooves in the track which even the grass does not hide. This must have been the way from Barkestone

to Granby for hundreds of years, yet use alone has given it the semblance of a road, and once the wheels of country carts ceased to grind in its ruts, it would soon completely disappear.

The area just described seems to have been forgotten, and to have retained the atmosphere of other centuries while remaining entirely remote from this.

The small tower of Granby Church appears distantly on the left, and the grass way turns sharply towards the village until it joins the road from Plungar, which soon enters among the autumn trees and old red houses. The lowness of the sun so characteristic of the time of year and the mellow orange-red tone of the old brick walls of Granby make the village appear as if bathed in a perpetual after-glow. The hues of sunset itself could only intensify what the season and the walls themselves suggest.

From Granby a road leads to Sutton and Elton, the Rectory Covert and Orston Grange lying to the right of it, and Whatton Manor on the Whippling Brook to the left. The Whippling is a tributary of the Smite, which here runs north of the Manor through Whatton village, to join the Devon a few miles further on. North-east of Whatton is Colman Hill, a good covert—usually drawn when the fixture is Whatton, though it lies just outside the Melton Saturday boundary as given. Nearer Elton is Oldfield Plantation.

Returning to Granby and taking the road to Langar, the famous little covert of Granby Gap is just over a mile to the south, close to Plungar. The road leads direct through Barnstone to the ancient and historic village from which Leland rode into Leicestershire.

Langar Church is surrounded by walls of old weathered brick, the same mellow shade of red as the houses. Fallen leaves lie thickly about the ancient gateway to the Hall, close by the church, and the rays of the sun slant through trees from which the leaves are slowly falling. The history of Langar may be traced through the monuments that lie in its church—the tombs of the Scropes and the Howes, and the Chaworths of Wiverton; some elaborate effigies and ornate memorials, that to the great Admiral merely a tablet on the wall. But Langar to-day has ceased to make history, and the village has dwindled until only a few scattered houses remain.

The home of the Howes and Samuel Butler, glowing in the autumnal light, is the last of the villages in this part of the Vale, with the colours of sunset on its walls and houses. Colston Basset on the Smite is nearer to the Wolds, which now appear as a low range of hills, and has a different character. The Hall is hidden in its wooded park, and fine trees surround the new church,

whose tall spire rises above them. South-west of the village, and close to the Smite, is Kaye Wood, one of the largest coverts in the Vale; while less than two miles south of it is the well-known little covert, Hose Thorns. It is situated on the far bank of the canal, by the bridge on the road to Long Clawson. Across the Smite, less than half a mile away, is Quorn country and

THE VALE FROM STATHERN HILL.

the village of Hickling. Hose Thorns leads inevitably to Sherbrooke's, the last famous Belvoir covert on the Smite.

Sherbrooke's Covert is half-way between Long Clawson and Hickling and has seen more great gallops than any spot in the Vale, with the exception of Jericho. Like the latter, this covert is just in Leicestershire, the county boundary running due west from the north end after having followed the course of the Smite for nearly two miles.

Returning by Hose and Harby (where there is another windmill on the bank

of the canal), past Harby Covert, on the county boundary a mile north of the village, we leave the Vale at Stathern Hill.

Stretching across the wide flat country, the courses of the railway and the canal are faintly discernible; the white smoke of trains moving across the blue distance tells of the railway, the windmill at Harby marks the canal; and hidden in the cold fog that has succeeded the last flame of sunset are the golden leaves, the red-walled villages, the ancient churches of the Vale.

EPILOGUE

" The season was hardly in character with the trip. Thorpe Trussels was radiant with dog roses, and honeysuckles clustered amid the hedges of Ashby Pasture."—THE DRUID.

ABOUT the middle of last century The Druid and Dick Christian took their immortal drive through the countries of the Quorn, the Cottesmore and the Belvoir, an account of which is set forth in the pages of " Silk and Scarlet," first published in 1859. They drove in a gig, Dick Christian holding the reins while he told one anecdote after another as each covert came in sight, The Druid making notes. The tour lasted three days. On the second day the gig was upset while they were making a short cut to Cream Gorse ; in the words of Dick Christian :

" What a balcher I comes out of the gig ! I drove my nose right into the ground : then you tumbles out on top of me, and pins my legs right down. There's about twelve stone of you ! I always likes to hitch my legs away, and you fairly held 'em fast. I thought the wheels would be over me. It's all very well—you've done nothing but laugh at me these ten minutes ; but your hat's quite as bad knocked in as mine. There's your note-book—I see it come flying over my head ; that'ull be your pencil, in that tuft of grass."

The gig was soon righted again, and The Druid was instructed to stand up in it, so that he might have a distant view of Barkby Holt, while Dick Christian picked a bunch of roses and honeysuckle for his " old woman." Then they drove on past Thorpe Trussels to Gartree Hill. Here, according to Dick Christian, Mr. Osbaldeston's fox lived : " He was a dark-coloured one ; most of the great runs I've seen have been with them sort." There was once a famous black fox that used to run from Clawson Thorns (the descendant of some foxes turned into the Belvoir woods by one of the Dukes of Rutland), and he may have left a progeny of dark-coloured stout-running foxes. The first drive continued through Little Dalby, and then back to Melton. Earlier in the day they had stopped at Welby : " That's ' The Great City,' just below you—Welby ; some people call it that. See what a funny old church ! There's not half-a-dozen houses in the parish." Dick

Christian remarked here on the number of falls he had taken in this country, "Two or three tumbles reg'lar before breakfast," and a regrettable increase in his weight, "I never got heavier till I had the small-pox second time, when I was fifty years of age, just about; wasn't it curious?"

Of Hugo Meynell we have a vivid picture a page or two further on: "What a wonderful man he was to holler! shrill voice, good language. He rode small horses with short tails." And of one of his whips, Jack Shirley: "He was an owdacious fellow; big and stout, with a rough voice." George Osbaldeston also has his portrait outlined in these pages: "'The Squire' was the oddest man you ever saw at a cover-side. He would talk for an hour; then he would half-draw, and talk again, and often blow his horn when there was no manner of occasion—always so chaffy."

The second drive was through Cottesmore country. When hounds met at Owston Wood, Dick Christian relates how he had to try a new horse for a prospective purchaser, riding it across country from Burton Toll Bar to Owston Wood and Pickwell, keeping close to the Pickwell road. "Dal! this is a rum 'un," he comments, and rode the horse straight between Pickwell and Somerby; when, after jumping four flights of rails, he was asked to make the return journey, the purchaser was well satisfied. He had a great enthusiasm for the Cottesmore country. "Now," says he to The Druid, "do stand up and look! There's a country worth your coming all the way from London to see. There's your country!"

Readers must turn to the pages of "Silk and Scarlet" to follow the pair during their discoursive tour, for if quotation is carried much further, a long chapter will be added to this book.

The third drive was over Belvoir country. "This is Branston Lings—a sure find; when it gets hollow, they burn it down; half of it is burnt now. Those are the Belvoir covers right from this 'ere hollow to Stathern Point; such ding-dong Will * has there among the cubs." Dick Christian goes from point to point, anecdotes following one another in his head: "It was as bold as that Smite job, when Lord Scarbro' come out like a drowned rat. That's all in my first lecture. Now you see Belvoir. The kennels are just down in the bottom, half a mile from the Castle; they were at Croxton in Mr. Newman's time, and nice old kennels they were. This weather will make the farmers skip about. I always think that valley looks particklar pretty; single trees like."

Yes, we agree with him, it does. And so do all the valleys and the hills

* Will Goodall.

these pages have attempted to describe; such men as Dick Christian, who knew every fence and every brook, who could not traverse the country without recalling some incident in this run or that, as one field gave place to another, have had time to pause and wonder at the beauties of Leicestershire. And there are many to-day who could not wish for a happier memory than a vision of the green fields and the dark fences of the High Country, the Vale, or the Wolds.

COUNTRY.

Dukes Cover

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